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THE HUMAN CRY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE TRUTHFUL LIAR

MAN AND THE CASSOCK

THE HUMAN CRY

BY

MRS. DAVID G. RITCHIE

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THE HUMAN CRY

CHAPTER I

LOVERS of the Sussex Downs will easily bring before their mental vision the smooth, low range of hills, sloping here and there almost to the very rim of the Channel and then swelling up again and onwards, always fringing the sea and always defying the great rolling waves that move heavily up from the Atlantic.

But defy them as they do, the sea is little by little gnawing away the white feet of the Downs, breaking them, narrowing them and approaching at a sure though tortoise pace the flat, open country of the great Weald of Sussex.

Although in every spot where the range has sunk and momentarily disappeared there is now a bustling watering-place like Southdean, the Downs on their northern side have been little troubled by civilization since the artist workman of prehistoric days cut his weapons and his tools from the rough flints that earthworms and the violence of weather had dug

out of the chalk and cast loose upon the thin surface soil.

The gorse still grows in gay, wealthy patches, and in the hollows one can find nothing but juniper or the stunted, crippled hawthorn and blackthorn bending their gnarled barks away from the ruthless south-west gale.

Sheep still browse upon the short, fine turf, which is now in the late autumn full of minute withered grasses, withered wild thyme, scentless violets dead down to their tiny roots. There are still the dew ponds, circular shallow basins beaten out of the chalk, used for watering the sheep.

Only the Weald has changed. From a little height you can look over the chimney-pots of Northdean House lying below you, with a tiny hamlet crouching under its park walls; and you can see nothing left of the ancient forests that came right up almost to where you stand—nothing but the oaks in the park and copses of beech and hazel here and there dotted about. In the empty spaces are cultivated fields, level meadows bordered by scanty brooks, distant villages, slanting grey-roofed churches with friendly squat towers, hamlets straying into deep lanes and disappearing except a faint uff of blue smoke. Faintly to the north

you may think you see the line of the north Downs.

On this November morning Mr. Aubrey Mossmore, having no taste for hunting the fox, had been shooting alone, without his host, over the fields round Northdean House. He was now standing almost at its gates, apparently looking at the round red sun that stood like some great mysterious fire on the skyline, but really looking at the tall figure of a girl climbing up the steep side of the down, as if she was a priestess of some ancient faith attending the descent of her God to the nether world.

'It 's only Miss Violet, sir,' said the gamekeeper; 'she always goes as far as that there straw-stack what 's standing at the top of that there ploughed 'ollow. She gets a bit of shelter for the view.' The man spoke with some pride in his voice. Mossmore could see the distant straw-stack. It looked black against the glowing sky—the girl's figure looked also black.

Mossmore was a man who never did anything without having some good reason for doing it.

He preferred to stay at Northdean House as guest of Mr. Richard Tremayne, rather than with Laurence, the Liberal candidate, at Southdean. He liked Laurence well enough; but

this was the last week of his holidays, and he wanted to be in the country and not in Southdean. Then, again, his reason for helping Laurence in his campaign was that he was anxious just at that moment to add one more to many proofs that his assistance was indispensable to his party. Mossmore had private reasons for knowing that the retirement of a member of the Cabinet was only being postponed for a few weeks, and that when it did occur there might be a shifting of places. Then, even among those who had pushed themselves to the front of the political stage, his claims to a vacant rôle could scarcely be overlooked.

Mossmore had not found success waiting for him. He had worked for it from the first. He came of an old but undistinguished family. He had won a scholarship to an Oxford college where intellectual distinction was a rarity. He had resisted everybody's efforts to make him waste his time. He was a born comedian, and he had put aside the temptation to amuse a few friends for a few minutes at the expense of his own career. He meant to go to the Bar, and to go in the best style. He was no thinker, and only took superficial interest in philosophy, but he meant to acquire a knowledge of whatever was necessary for the most distinguished

degree at Oxford. What he could not fully grasp he could talk about, write about and take sides about. He had the gift of speech and pen, and he took a first in ' Greats.'

Almost from the beginning he was a success at the Bar. His ingenuity was very great, and his temper was never ruffled. Chancery work would have given him no scope. What he was supremely good at was in addressing juries —he understood them. But the Bar was not his ultimate aim.

Had he determined to become an ecclesiastic (and his face would have graced that profession admirably) he would easily have taught himself to preach sermons on Christian mysticism which, though they might not have satisfied St. Paul, would have enraptured Mrs. Grundy.

But politics were Mossmore's real ambition. He longed to deal with masses of men—to move their minds, rouse, if necessary, their passions. He drew in the emotion of an audience as a man draws in the breath of life; it was an emotion that he himself had the power to create. It came back to him—of what he gave he received a thousandfold.

He had from the first naturally drifted towards the party that would give him fullest scope for his powers. Not that he was consciously

a humbug. No party principles entirely convinced him, and their tactics—necessary perhaps—placed the whole practical working of party politics outside what he considered to be the strictly moral plane.

Besides, Mossmore thought he was certain of one thing, that men *have* 'rights' and 'wrongs' as well as 'duties'; and to tell the sovereign masses of their rights and wrongs thrills them, while it is obvious that to tell them of their duties bores them. Mossmore wanted to thrill them.

'What is mine is yours' has been read with unction from the lectern for nineteen centuries with conspicuous absence of success.

'What is yours is mine' is now being preached from the platform, and may be vulgarly described as 'catching on.' Mossmore at heart was a genial sceptic. His great bodily vigour and perfect digestion allowed him to distrust human nature without bitterness or malice. He rather doubted whether the great patriotic statesmen, such as those who in the old days of Whig and Tory led the country, were wanted in these days. As a discreet Cabinet Minister remarked lately: 'The duty of the Cabinet Minister is to respond to the least fluctuation in the feeling of his side of the House.'

As to the broader question—the ultimate destiny of man—he, Mossmore, doubted whether there was what could be seriously called 'a destiny.' Races, nations, communities rise and fall, come and go, and in the last days even the culminating masterpiece of Evolution (Mr. Kipling suggests that this may be the American German Jew) will not, like the modest Diplodocus, leave a bone behind him for some provincial museum—*his* remains will be obliterated in the organic atrophy of the globe.

Is that anything to make a man weep? Certainly not. Mossmore was in the full enjoyment of the warmth of life—the rush and noise of the world. Rarely he had a moment for contemplative thought.

The three days he had spent at Northdean had been the quietest he had spent for a long time. So quiet that he had had time to think a good deal about Violet Broadlow. Now Mossmore, being one of the 'eligible men,' knew a good deal about mothers with daughters, and even more about the daughters themselves. If they were adepts at pursuing, he had become an adept at running away at the proper moment for doing so.

What struck him with surprise was that Miss Broadlow, a solitary orphan (and to judge

by Mrs. Tremayne's manner to her, poor), had made no attempt to attract his attention either by being very agreeable or very rude.

She seemed to be preoccupied, looking after other people—after Molly, the Tremayne's only child. She was always at hand to help with anything, and Tremayne, when he came in from hunting (he was Master of the Southdean Foxhounds), was in the habit of saying, 'Where 's Violet ? ' as if her presence had become necessary to him. One of the things that Violet did for him was to dust a pathetic little museum leading out of the smoke-room. Tremayne objected to servants touching his scanty collection of flint instruments and fossils. He had a passion for prehistoric man, and especially for prehistoric man in Sussex.

Possibly Miss Broadlow had no social ambition. If so, she was the first girl Mossmore had come across who hadn't. She went about apparently serene, always saying something sensible and cheerful when spoken to, but letting no one into her secret confidence. Mossmore knew that, for he had only that morning tried to draw her out in his very best manner, the manner to which women most easily succumb—namely, a manner of respectful curiosity tinged with sentiment. Violet had turned the talk upon

himself in a way that was either masterly, or else ingenuously unselfish.

Her indifference to herself had only made him more eager to rouse her vanity, if she had any. There she was climbing the Downs to look at the sunset, all alone.

Mossmore, who knew men and women, did not need the gamekeeper to tell him that the tall figure dark against the blue sky was Miss Broadlow's. The only other person it could have been was Mrs. Tremayne, and Mrs. Tremayne would not have climbed that hill alone to see the sunset. She would have secured the company of one or more persons likely to appreciate her appreciation of the sunset. And that sunset would last her a very long time. She would speak for months—if not for years—of her habit (sentimental, if you like) of climbing the hills to see sunsets and drinking in their inner meaning with each breath, whenever she had a moment to spare unclaimed by the tumultuous world. It was *not* Mrs. Tremayne.

Mossmore was dazzled by looking under his hand at the dark figure against the globe of crimson fire. He turned into the gates of Northdean House and walked along the avenue. It was nearly dark under the shadow of those oaks.

The gamekeeper turned off to the servants' entrance, and Mossmore, solitary now and thoughtful, nearly stumbled against Molly, a girl of thirteen, dressed in riding breeches and gaiters, who bounced at him suddenly.

'Father isn't back yet. We've had a long day of it, and the most splendid run.'

Here she took his arm and was silent very suddenly, peering at his profile in the half-dark.

'What's the matter?' asked Mossmore, without turning his head. 'Any secrets?'

'A sort of a kind of a secret,' she said, 'though not exactly.'

She struck her own gaiters with her whip and hesitated. 'I wish people would always guess what you were going to say, and then you wouldn't have to say it,' she remarked mysteriously.

'Don't you think that would be rather dull?' said Mossmore.

'Perhaps it would,' said Molly. 'Well, here goes. Do you remember saying yesterday—just before you and mother started for that meeting—that I must be clever to write that rotten little magazine called *Hearts and Hands*?'

'I didn't call it rotten,' said Mossmore.

'I know,' said Molly, 'but it is. Well, I don't write it—there!'

She peered again at his profile for any signs of emotion. He showed none.

'You 're not the editor, then ? ' he remarked.

'Yes, I am,' said Molly. 'I 'm the youngest editor in Great Britain—only I don't write anything. Mother writes some of it, also other people—friends—send stuffy bosh and Violet corrects the spelling and tidies it up and all that.'

'I understand,' said Mossmore.

'My photograph is on the cover—that 's all I do,' said Molly.

'Very interesting,' said Mossmore. 'Most editors would not look so well on the covers of their magazines.'

'Well, now you know the truth,' said Molly. 'That 's all I wanted to say. Now I 'm off to meet Vi,' and she released Mossmore's arm and disappeared up the avenue.

CHAPTER II

A LITTLE later in the afternoon Mr. Richard Tremayne, still in his hunting dress, was seated before the fire in the hall at Northdean House. He was a small, thin man, fair-haired, clean-looking, with pleasant features and very little conversation.

He had heard the sound of a motor-car in the avenue and was listening for the entrance of his wife. Letting go the swing door from the outer hall with a bang, she swept in; her voice ringing out in clear tones that demanded attention.

'Life really is one mad rush from day to day, from hour to hour, from minute to minute.' She looked round the hall as if addressing an audience.

'Are you speaking to me, my dear?' asked Tremayne.

'To you or anybody,' said Mrs. Tremayne as she came round to the fireplace and looked down at her husband.

Eva Tremayne was a handsome woman of about three-and-thirty, dark, well set up, well groomed, holding her head high. Her brown eyes when she was talking about herself had a flicker in them as if she was staring at a candle.

'It 's not life, it 's you that does the rushing,' said Tremayne, looking lazily into the fire.

'So you say,' said Mrs. Tremayne, smiling.

'You 're always among the hounds, interferin' with them,' said Tremayne, smiling too.

'So you say,' said Eva again.

'What is it this afternoon? Bridge, or good works?' he asked, feeling that he ought to show sympathy.

'You never know,' said Mrs. Tremayne, moving away. 'Why, it 's politics, politics, and always politics. No, I 've done everything for to-day—except this evening's meeting; dinner sharp at seven, and don't dress, of course; remember you 've promised to come——'

'What about Violet?'

'No room,' said his wife; 'you and Mr. Mossmore, Pansy and I fill the car too full as it is; besides, Violet doesn't care for meetings—you know that.' She went to a couch and sat down on it for a moment, watching Johnson, the old butler, putting down the teapot on the centre table. She talked as she watched.

'After lunch I read Mr. Mossmore's speech for this evening, I have to talk about it in giving a vote of thanks. It 's better even than his address to our women last night. I got Violet to type it, so that I could run through it; I 'm so busy I can't struggle with manuscript. You 're not interested, Dick. Well, it doesn't matter, the speech is simply splendidly able—convincing—profoundly true.'

As Tremayne made no reply she continued. 'Since then I 've been to see Pansy about our next committee meeting——'

'What the devil does Pansy know about politics?' said Tremayne.

'Know? Why, she 's one of the secretaries.'

'What does she know?' repeated Tremayne in a milder tone.

'Oh, know?' said Mrs. Tremayne, taking off her gloves and getting up to pour out tea. 'Why, she knows as much as the other women know. Oh, I worship politics, but I do hate political women, they are so extremely odd.'

'I don't like 'em,' said Tremayne, moving his chair a little so as to be able to stretch a hand to reach his cup.

'That 's different,' said his wife. 'That 's prejudice; you don't know any of them, except Pansy. I do. If I hadn't been practically

forced into it I don't know that I should have touched politics, but I 've been literally sucked in by the tide. A woman's influence is needed. Her moral effect is incalculable, so I have to swim for all I am worth. After all, life was meant for that—duties—duties. Mr. Mossmore come back ? '

' He 's in,' said Tremayne. ' Violet 's not in.'

' She 's having tea with Molly, I expect. It 's really nice and quite right of her; Molly is getting too old for Mrs. Thompson. Well, Dick,' she hurried on, ' you may take my word for it that Mr. Mossmore will be in the Cabinet at the very next chance. He has endless, endless ability. Some men get into the Cabinet by mistake—by being related to the Prime Minister, or something else silly—but Mr. Mossmore will climb in by sheer force of brain and pluck! They can't overlook his claim, that 's a fact. He will " arrive "—that 's what I call life, my dear Dick.'

' Oh, you call that life, do you ? ' said Tremayne, sipping his tea.

' Life—life,' said his wife. ' Very different from what you 're doing, poor old Dick. There you go, preserving the same old coverts year after year, blowing the same old horn three days a week to show that you 've been clever

enough to find one of the cubs you 've been carefully rearing. You follow it over the same old fields, jump the same old ditches, scramble out on the same old side——'

'Sometimes on the other side,' said Tremayne good-naturedly.

'Well, then, I 'll let you have the other side,' said Eva. 'And then you tootle home to fall asleep in that chair till the dressing bell rings. It 's most healthy, most praiseworthy, but it 's not life.'

Tremayne stirred his tea, though there was no sugar in it. 'You used to like my being "Master," ' he said. 'Once——'

Mrs. Tremayne did not reply; she busied herself with the teapot.

'Then there was a time—later—when you wanted me to be a bishop!'

'Nonsense, my dear Dick; how you do exaggerate!'

'Now, I suppose you 're annoyed with me because I am not a politician.'

'Annoyed!' repeated Mrs. Tremayne, 'I 'm merely sorry—just a teeny-weeny bit disappointed that you are losing all that 's worth having in life; for your own sake, I 'm disappointed.'

Mrs. Tremayne raised her eyebrows very high

indeed and looked compassionately at a piece of toast that she held in her fingers. She could not think why the past should ever be referred to; the future was what interested her.

Mrs. Tremayne was the only daughter of a country solicitor—a Liberal in politics and a Dissenter. She had been sent to a modern boarding school, where every minute had been mapped out and occupied; consequently Eva went home to begin life with an absolute incapacity for filling up her time when she was alone. She was always either starting out to keep some athletic or social engagement, or she was coming back from keeping one.

After her father's death she spent a winter at Southdean, and while there she made up her mind to renounce Liberalism and Nonconformity. She joined the Southdean Hunt.

It all turned out for the best. It was her youthful triumph to capture and marry the Master, Mr. Richard Tremayne.

He was not wealthy, but he was of old family. To her surprise she discovered that Dick was a Liberal, if he was anything, and that although a Churchman, he did not speak of Dissenters with any sort of scorn. She was at first a little bit shocked at this attitude of his, but she got used to it.

Once established at Northdean House, she decided that as *the* great county family of Sussex was Liberal, it did not matter if the 'best people' in Southdean were Tories. She allowed herself therefore to come round loyally to her husband's party, though she really had to 'draw a line' at Dissenters.

For some time she was fully occupied with knowing the people whom it was desirable to know, and with the novelty of entertaining. There was also the excitement of Molly's birth and babyhood. But time went on, and with it came a sense of monotony. Now that the Master of the Southdean Hunt was her own husband and she knew the Field to nausea, her enthusiasm for sport died gradually away. She wanted more scope.

She became convinced that she ought to work for Humanity, and what could be more important for Humanity than religion?

She began by agitating for the revival of the Mass, that dear old ancient, ancient office of the Catholic Church.

This agitation necessitated much running about and meeting of Churchmen with advanced views. It meant perpetual and sleepless vigilance and going up to town.

In fact, the responsibility of the future of

Anglicanism was so heavy upon her that she was obliged to get Violet to learn typewriting and type her correspondence for her. The future of Anglicanism seemed to be assured when Mrs. Tremayne fell out with her bishop and with the rector of Southdean. She saw clearly that her efforts had not been appreciated in the quarters from which she ought to have been able to command most respect, and after due consideration she washed her hands of the whole affair. It was over!

Again came the question: What to do for Humanity? Onwards, ever onwards in the strenuous life.

What about politics? A woman's presence in the political world always made for purity, to say the least of it. What about beginning with the Southdean Women's Liberal Association?

All the 'best people' belonged to the Primrose League, but that did not matter. The Duchess of Sussex was a Liberal.

A month later and Mrs. Tremayne reluctantly consented to become the President of the S.W.L.A., with the Duchess as patroness. Miss Jones, the secretary, who had been working for the Association for four years, was returned to her position of trust along with Pansy Lady Peacock; Miss Jones undertaking to continue

to do all the work in return for the pleasure of putting her name after the bold signature of her co-secretary.

The Primrose League contained no member who could speak coherently on any subject, and Mrs. Tremayne meant to crush it by the law of the survival of the fittest. She meant to make politics hum in Southdean as they had never hummed before.

The opportunity was great. Here they were on the eve of a by-election, and she had secured the assistance of the most popular platform speaker in the House of Commons to help hoist the Liberal candidate, Mr. Laurence, into the House upon his opponent's shoulders.

'We didn't ask to be born,' said Mrs. Tremayne slowly, 'but now that we *are* born we must play the game. Look at Mr. Mossmore; you can't open the paper now without seeing his name. He is either speaking or arbitrating or doing something prominent.'

'I don't object to your being interested in politics, but I don't care altogether to have my wife doing the political dirty work for any man —not even for Laurence, who is a good man— mind you.'

'It's all right, dear,' said Eva; 'I don't do any dirty work, I assure you. I make Mrs.

Smith, Brown, and Robinson of Southdean do the work. I preside, I talk, I inspire them!'

Tremayne was silent. He wasn't quite sure whether this was a proper solution of the question; also he was a little frightened at modern Liberalism, and this alarm had not been lessened when he had happened one day to be taken into the National Liberal Club and had caught a lengthened glimpse of some of its members.

'I suppose I shall have to go this evening,' he sighed. 'Why not take Violet instead? I dare say Mossmore would be pleased enough.'

'Why?' asked his wife, so sharply that he turned his head to look at her.

'Why? A good-looking, clever girl——' he said with some insistence.

Mrs. Tremayne smiled a queer sort of smile.

'I don't deny that she is good-looking, but, Dick, clever she is not!'

'She wants bringing out more—going out more,' said Tremayne, 'with young people.' He was a little alarmed at his own audacity at saying this to his wife, but finding it met by silence, he became bolder.

'A girl who has no parents wants something——'

'"No parents" don't matter,' said Eva;

'what matters is no money and no audacity—no push! As to parents, what possible good could that poor Sir James have done her? A father who was mad is the worst possible advertisement for a daughter, and an imbecile brother—poor thing. I really never can understand, Dick, why your sister married a Broadlow. I thought all the Tremaynes were so sensible.'

'She was only a child at the time, and,' added Tremayne in a low voice, 'I think she lost her head; anyhow, poor thing, she was horribly punished, and it's not for us, or for anybody, to blame her now.' Tremayne got up from his chair and stood with his back to the glowing fire. The subject of his sister's marriage was always intensely painful to him.

Mrs. Tremayne took no notice of his move and went on talking.

'As to Mr. Mossmore, my dear boy, I am afraid that he won't waste any time thinking about Violet, poor girl. I wish he would. He will want a great deal, if he ever does marry—wealth, brilliancy——'

If Mr. Mossmore had shown any interest in anybody in the house it wasn't in Violet, but in *herself*. Did it ever cross his mind that *she* would have made an ideal wife for an ambitious

politician? Did it strike him? Oh, those 'would-have-mades'!

While she pondered the door opened, and the very man she was thinking of came in. He had changed his clothes and was dressed in a frock-coat, looking the very model of an able, impressive English gentleman.

'Here you are,' cried Mrs. Tremayne; 'you look as if you were prepared for the campaign this evening.'

'So I am,' said Mossmore, walking up to the tea-table. 'I 'm all ready. While Tremayne has been killing the fox and I 've been slaughtering a few dicky-birds, what have you been doing? Something more elevated, eh, Mrs. Tremayne?'

'Much more,' she replied. 'For one thing, I 've been reading your speech.'

'Ah!' said Mossmore. 'I knew Miss Broadlow was good enough to type it for you; in fact, I ventured unwisely to ask her if she approved of its sentiments.'

'Unwisely?' asked Tremayne from the fireplace.

'Most foolishly,' said Mossmore. 'For the only answer I got from that lady was that she had not thought the matter over. She spoke, as she always does, kindly but firmly.'

Mrs. Tremayne laughed. 'Violet is very much occupied with herself; you mustn't mind. She is such a dear, dear girl, in spite of everything.'

Tremayne's face expressed disapproval. He was about to open his lips when his wife prevented him.

'Well,' she said, 'let me give you my poor little opinion, Mr. Mossmore. Your speech is statesmanlike—great!'

She spoke as if the question was settled.

'You are a great believer in Humanity, Mrs. Tremayne?' said Mossmore, taking up his cup of tea.

'*Ra-ther*,' said Eva; 'I'd put my last dollar on it.'

'Whatever opinion you may have of Humanity,' said Mossmore, 'it remains a fact that there's nothing else worth thinking of, and I hope I shall make this clear to my audience; We shall come in "broad-based" upon the People's will at Southdean. That is my prophecy!'

'I don't think we trust Humanity enough,' said Eva; 'when all's said and done, human nature is half-divine, don't you think?'

'On the face of it, it don't look always like it,' said Tremayne, who was profoundly old-

fashioned in his religious views. He believed in hell and in sin as well as in heaven and in righteousness.

'Humanity 's altogether divine—in a sense,' said Mossmore, taking up a crumpet, 'in a sense; but this is bordering on metaphysics, and we are practical politicians, I hope. We are occupied with definite offers that we are making to the People to improve their condition without asking them to prove their spiritual pedigree.'

Mrs. Tremayne clapped her hands softly together. 'It is such a treat to hear you talk—such an education. This reminds me. I simply *had* to ask Pansy Lady Peacock to come in to dinner and go with us. She made me promise. I do hope you won't be bored. My dear old pal does talk such impossible nonsense, but you 've no idea how loyal she is to the cause. You 'll simply love her.'

'Pansy doesn't sound political exactly,' said Mossmore, 'but she gives her moral support, I understand! I thought she looked charming—she and Miss Jones! Charming each in her different way.'

Mrs. Tremayne smiled very broadly and then she laughed.

'Most charming! I must explain that Lady

Peacock's present husband is Captain Smith, R.N.'

'I see,' said Mossmore.

'That 's not because she doesn't like the name Smith,' said Mrs. Tremayne, 'she admires it intensely; but she doesn't want to forget poor old Peacock, it wouldn't be playing the game. Pansy is so loyal and plucky.'

'I 'm sure she is,' said Mossmore, but he seemed suddenly to be thinking of something else. A door had opened. But it was only the servants' door, and the old butler, Johnson, came in and spoke to his master in a voice that, though meant to be secret and low, was very audible.

'Jim Watson wants to speak to you, sir.'

'What about?'

'He says his cow 's dead, sir, and he wants to know what he 's to do, sir.'

'Bury it, of course,' said Tremayne, 'or the District Council will know the reason why.'

'That isn't what he means, sir,' said Johnson.

Tremayne was mute for a second. Then he handed his cup to the man.

'I suppose I must see him, Johnson. Take him into the gun-room.'

'He 's there, sir,' said the man, and he left the hall.

'Really, Dick,' said his wife, looking at him with an indulgent smile, 'you are silly. They all impose on you; you know you can't trust one of them to tell the truth. The Sussex labourer is the most hopeless person—absolutely,' she added, turning to Mossmore; 'not an atom of self-respect.'

Mrs. Tremayne shook her head and kissed her hand to her husband as he went to the door.

'If you had to live on eighteen shillings a week and keep me and Molly out of it, you 'd need advice, my dear, and perhaps something more substantial,' he said, and closed the door after him.

Mrs. Tremayne laughed. 'I don't know about that. It is more difficult to live on a moderate income than on a weekly wage; in fact, it 's heart-breaking, it is indeed, Mr. Mossmore! There 's one thing my husband can't do, and that is argue. He can hunt a fox with the best, but he can't argue!'

CHAPTER III

IN the old days Mrs. Tremayne had enjoyed going to confession more than any other of her religious duties. There were moments when intelligent sympathy did one good; when it was a real relief to be able to express aloud with absolute sincerity one's inner thoughts, to speak of one's grievances, of the vexations that came to one from intercourse with tiresome people or misguided people.

Pansy, of course, always gave her sympathy, but it could scarcely be called intelligent, and after the rupture with the bishop and the rector of Southdean Mrs. Tremayne began to doubt whether the sympathy of priests was intelligent either. The celibate priest is an abnormal person, and the married priest is just an ordinary gossip. A broad-minded man of the world, a complete human being, is obviously the only kind of person with whom a cultured woman can discuss 'life.' Eva preferred men to women, merely because men were

more 'complete.' She had never come across a man so complete as Mossmore.

After having been busy, busy, busy working for others, it would be refreshing just to think of herself for a few minutes. It would be refreshing to hear what Mossmore had to say about herself.

Here was an opportunity, until Dick returned, of having a frank talk about life and about herself. Mossmore was already making a move to leave the hall and go into the smoke-room. He had finished his cup of tea and refused another. He wanted to go and look over his speech. Mrs. Tremayne, however, had made up her mind. 'Mr. Mossmore,' she said, going to the mantelpiece and putting her foot on the fender, 'I really must explain that it is not my fault that Dick is not standing for Southdean. That would have given our party the best chance.'

'Tremayne!' said Mossmore, a little surprised at that worthy huntsman being accused of political aspirations.

'Yes,' said Eva; 'if only Dick had been willing to stand I could have coached him up. But he wouldn't. He wouldn't give up the Mastership and he hates London, so we had to let Mr. Laurence stand, though he 's a bit of a

recluse and not known as Dick is. It 's a thousand pities! Why, I would have worked heart and soul for Dick. It 's not my fault if he limits himself to small local committees, charities and the like.'

'Surely Tremayne has never cared for politics?' said Mossmore cautiously. How could a sensible woman have expected him to give up doing the one thing he could really do in a masterly fashion and do something else for which he was not fitted!

'You mean,' she said swiftly, 'that I ought to have known he wouldn't care for politics. How could I know? As a girl I didn't know anything of the great world-problems that we women must help to solve. I knew nothing of it.'

Mossmore did not speak, he waited to hear more. He had met women before who had succeeded in dragging a most unsuitable husband into political life in order to force him to go to London. He had never happened to hear one of these women explain her reasons.

'I want Molly to understand the awful responsibility we women of England have. I want to give *her* the best, best chance in the world.'

She spoke with melancholy regret. Then she

added, 'It 's my nature to want to make the most of life, to long to grasp life with both hands—both!' His silence, concentrated on herself, made her heart glow; although he was but one person, he was a great audience.

'I think some people are afraid of life. I never was. I want to meet it and test it fully. That 's what we 're here for, if we only knew.'

'What exactly do you mean by testing it fully?' he asked. His voice was impartial, tentative, but also that of an interested listener.

She was gratified at his curiosity, though she thought it a little stupid of him not to jump at once to her meaning.

'I mean self-realization,' she murmured, holding up her hand against the blaze of the fire. 'The realization of the self.'

Mossmore bowed his head.

'And there 's not room for us all, only for some of us?'

'How do you mean?' she asked, a little nettled.

'The only form of self-realization there 's room for—for all of us—is that form recommended by the New Testament writers (whoever they may have been). And, frankly, I doubt if Evolution intends that. Do I shock you?'

She wasn't shocked at the New Testament observation. When one has got to the heart of things one is never shocked; one sees some truth in all ideas, however imperfect. Since her upset with the bishop she had been reading higher criticism, and felt that Humanity had gained in every way by the discovery that other persons and not the apostles had written the New Testament. What did shock her in Mossmore's speech was the phrase 'room—for all of us,' and he had repeated it twice.

'Some people don't want room,' she said. 'I am quite sure my dear Violet doesn't. People differ so much. I am speaking to you now of myself. I sometimes feel cramped, caged. The great, great world calling to me, time slipping away, and so much that could be done.'

'You are too young to feel time slipping away, though it does deucedly,' said Mossmore.

'Don't head me off the trail,' she said, smiling. 'I have a passion for Humanity. Humanity is sacred. If you don't care for the Sermon on the Mount, there are Plato and all the great free souls past and gone.'

Mossmore could stand a good deal, but the 'great free souls' annoyed him. 'And what could you do more than you are doing for Humanity?' he asked, smiling.

'More? Why, if Dick would give up the hounds we could afford to live part of the year in town. You have no idea how narrowing this place is, how suburban. The women are dull—and respectable.'

'It's something to be keen on the Ten Commandments!' he remarked.

She could not tell by his face what he meant.

'They'd keep twenty if they could get them,' she said, 'and be none the better for it. They live on the surface of life—they never think.'

'Nobody thinks,' said Mossmore, 'except one or two.'

Mrs. Tremayne shrugged her shoulders.

'You can afford to chaff—you are a fortunate man. Life has given you everything.'

'There you are wrong,' said Mossmore, and he moved away from the fire and began to walk the length of the hall. 'I've had to work twelve hours a day, and not lose my digestion or my temper. Both happen to be naturally good; but we all like to get a little credit.'

'Infinite credit,' she said. 'But let me tell you that work is exactly what I long for. I ask nothing better than to work twelve—fourteen hours a day. Work is—joy! Hard, hard work is—joy!'

He turned and looked at her.

'Joy!' she repeated, and she went towards the couch where she had thrown down her cloak and gloves. Work was indeed joy. 'What could be more splendidly rapturous than to spend twelve hours, fourteen hours talking to people, meeting people, telling crowds of dear helpless people what ought to be done for the uplifting of Humanity, feeling oneself ever so close to the vital heart of the world—beating—beating?'

She was afraid, in spite of Mossmore's brlliiant attainments, he was, underneath, a little shallow and unsatisfactory when it came to the test.

'Work is forbidden me—and I am sometimes restless. Do you blame me, Mr. Mossmore?'

This was her test question, and he failed to meet it.

'I never blame anybody but my political opponents,' said Mossmore. 'I reserve all my powers of vituperation for them when I am on the platform. I have no blame left for my friends.'

Eva took up her gloves. He was not satisfactory. 'Do you blame me?' she repeated, as she took up her cloak, 'or do you prefer the woman who sits down in ignoble ease?' Frankly she was disappointed with him.

As Mossmore went to the door and opened it for her he had time to consider his reply.

'I think you underrate the significance of your own personality,' he said. 'You don't need to go anywhere to find the great vital heart of Humanity, it is beating in your own breast.'

It was not until Eva had nearly reached the top of the staircase that she suddenly came to the conclusion that Mossmore's final words were not as complimentary as she had taken them to be at the moment. The fact was that he had dismissed her and her vital heart very cleverly. Yes, very cleverly. She stamped her foot on the last stair and stood for a moment motionless with annoyance.

The wide corridor facing her was dimly lit. The door of her sitting-room was open; only a faint light came from it. There was no doubt that the house was dull, and there was no money to spend on it. It was a case of living from hand to mouth—just enough and no more; just enough for existence—and here was Dick giving, giving, giving perpetually: he could do that. Somehow he always had something to give, but nothing to spend.

How would Mr. Mossmore like to live here at Northdean and on their income? Able as he

was, agreeable as he was, he had a man's selfishness. He had everything that life could give, and could not see why a woman shouldn't be contented without anything. Would he have been contented to live in the hamlet of Northdean?

She went into her bedroom. Three things caught her attention: the bright fire, the dark liquid surface of the mirror, and her new hat from Madame Flora lying on the bed with a piece of tissue paper over it. She pulled off the paper and took up the hat. She put the light on over the long mirror and arranged her hat carefully on her splendid black hair. That green feather added a flashing look of distinction to an already distinguished figure. It was preposterous that that hat and that hair underneath should be wasted on a mere watering-place like Southdean.

She had brains and go enough to rule the world. All that was needed was money.

She had not realized when she married at twenty how much there was in the world to lose or to gain. She had naturally thought Tremayne quite a grand match. She looked into the mirror at herself with a sardonic smile.

What could she not have done with money—and with a title?

She could have undoubtedly done more good to the world—and the world needed

her help terribly. With a title and money she would have been the greatest political woman in England. She took off her hat and sat down before the fire. Her imagination was working strongly. What might she not have been if titled and wealthy? Oh, she might have been——

She could see a page in the *Lady's Field* or the *Queen* :—

'Lady Tremayne chatting pleasantly with the oldest inhabitant of Southdean.'

'Lady Tremayne shaking hands with the Matron of the Southdean Cottage Hospital and congratulating her on the good work done there.'

'Lady Tremayne standing on the steps of Northdean House, with her favourite dog "Chummy" in her arms, discussing the approaching election with Mr. Laurence, the Liberal candidate. Lady Tremayne is as fearless a critic of current politics as she is a rider to hounds.'

'Lady Tremayne's sitting-room at No. — Park Lane (Observe the books and papers).' 'Lady Tremayne' setting other people to work in various useful ways looked much better than merely 'Mrs. Tremayne' setting other people to work in various, etc., etc.

What profound fools women with titles and

wealth were to make so little of the enormous pull they had over women without titles and wealth. If only she could be 'Lady Tremayne, Countess of Southdean!' She could picture herself at a political drawing-room in town, the centre of all the hum and bustle of life, of progress. She could fancy herself lightly, even chaffingly, exchanging political passwords with Cabinet Ministers. She could see the Minister of War taking, in a kindly way, the arm of a newly elected member of some important constituency. She could hear him say:—

'You want to be presented to Lady Tremayne. Wait a moment. She is too busy now. I'll take you up presently.' She could see the keen look of pleasure in the young man's eyes, and she felt her own moisten with sympathy. Oh, the 'might-have-beens'!

She put her handkerchief up to her eyes, when a sudden thought struck her.

Was there anything in Dick's remark about Mr. Mossmore and Violet? It was not possible, of course, and yet—— She got up from her chair, rang her bell, and began moving about the room, opening and shutting drawers.

'Go and see where Miss Violet is and then come and dress me,' she said to her maid.

Mr. Mossmore would make a successful

marriage if he got into the Cabinet. He would want a wife with wealth or social position. At present a Cabinet Minister is somebody.

Eva had for a long time preferred Mrs. Humphry Ward's novels to any others. She was attracted and impressed by the author's conscientious descriptions of important persons, and her sincere conviction that when dealing with politics and religion her notes had been correctly prepared.

Eva was not really interested in the apparently insoluble problem of good and evil. For one thing, in her heart of hearts, she never could understand why there should be a sex problem. It was inconceivable to her that any woman should be such a fool as to desire a man who could be of no use to her socially. As to the more elementary forms of vice, she did not really know what the fuss was all about, although she would not have owned this for all the world.

At present, anyhow, politics were important and political personages were somebodies. Mossmore was already a somebody, and would very soon be very notably somebody. Years hence, of course, things might change. The payment of members and a great increase in the Labour party might reduce the British Parliament to the same level as a Town Council.

When that time came a Cabinet Minister might be gratified at being asked to tea at a real gentleman's house. But that time had not come, and Mr. Mossmore would expect a good deal from the woman he married.

Miss Violet was still at tea with Miss Molly, was the news brought by the maid.

This was highly satisfactory. Mr. Mossmore had to catch an early train on the following day. There wasn't time or opportunity for Violet to see much of Mossmore now—not that it really mattered. It was only Dick's absurd devotion to Violet that made him mention her and Mr. Mossmore in the same breath. Nobody else would have thought of it, for Violet was entirely wanting in the supreme social quality—'push,' 'self-assertion.' No ambitious man would marry her. In spite of her absolute certainty that Violet was innocuous, Mrs. Tremayne was a little relieved when there came a knock on her door just as Amelia was doing her hair, and in came Violet and Molly.

'I 'm so sorry, Violet,' said her aunt, 'that I can't ask you to come with us this evening; but what can one do when one is restricted to a single motor and there 's no carriage? I cannot afford to hire—and there—the car will be full!'

'Full with three people?' questioned Molly, whose whole nature was soaked in scepticism.

'Four persons,' said Mrs. Tremayne. 'Besides your father, there's Pansy coming to dinner and afterwards to the meeting.'

'Oh!' said Molly, and she began to examine the articles on her mother's toilet-table.

'But I know you don't care for meetings, Violet,' added Mrs. Tremayne.

Violet was almost as tall as Mrs. Tremayne. She was perhaps a little too thin. Her hair was a dark brown, her oval face long and almost beautiful from its kindly expression. Both these women, the younger one and the elder, had fine dark eyes, only there was a difference between them. When Eva was not talking about herself or about Humanity her eyes wore a blank look; Violet's eyes were always full of a subdued fire.

'It's all right, Aunt Eva,' said Violet; 'I generally hate meetings,' and she smiled.

Nevertheless she had a reason for wishing to go to this one.

'Well, Molly,' said Mrs. Tremayne with great suavity, 'it's delightful for you to have your cousin Violet to tea. It really is very good of you, Violet. You know how little I am able to have the child with me. Although no one

can really take my place, duty to Humanity has to come first. I am glad to know that you are with her instead of always, always Mrs. Thompson.'

'Why is rouge always magenta?' demanded Molly as she fingered her mother's toilet things.

'It isn't magenta,' said Mrs. Tremayne.

'It 's got purple in it,' said Molly. 'It never matches you when you get hot.'

'Don't argue so much, Molly; you 've no idea how fatiguing it is, and I have notes to make for my speech.'

Mrs. Tremayne stretched out her hand to a sheet of paper and a pencil that were lying on the toilet-table.

'I think, Molly,' she added, 'that you had better run away now. Do your half-hour's practice and go to bed.'

'Very well, mother,' said Molly with a sigh of resignation. She kissed her and went towards the door. Violet was following her when Mrs. Tremayne called out:—

'Wait a moment, Violet!'

Molly had left the room, and Violet stood half-way between the door and Mrs. Tremayne, who spoke to her without turning her head.

'You don't happen to know whether your Uncle Dick is with Mr. Mossmore, do you?'

Violet did not know.

'I expect they are both in the smoke-room. Wait a moment. What do you think of the hat now I've got it? Pansy went with us. Amelia, that hat on the bed. Now, do you think it will do for a political meeting?'

The maid placed the hat on Mrs. Tremayne's head, and the two wrestled with it till it was perched at the right angle. Mrs. Tremayne looked steadily into the mirror with her head high. Yes, it was too good for Southdean. To do her justice, Mrs. Tremayne was not enamoured of her own face; it was her style and her intellect that astonished her.

Violet looked at her aunt's elegance and praised it.

'You really and truly think it suits me?' said Mrs. Tremayne. 'I want to make a good effect, not merely because of the principle of the thing, though that influences me greatly, but because Mr. Mossmore somehow suggests getting the best that poor Southdean can produce.' Here she laughed. 'When he marries his millionaire heiress she will have to be *very, very*—imposing.'

Mrs. Tremayne looked at the back of her head. The effect of that was not so good, but what did it matter? She was going to face the

audience. 'Yes, she will have to be *very, very*——' she repeated.

Violet's dark eyes looked wistfully out of her face.

'Mr. Mossmore will get into the Cabinet, where there are men who, some of them, are not gentlemen, and quite right too. We want *all* Humanity to be represented, and so few are gentlemen. He will rule them—you know what that means. Mr. Mossmore will go very far, and he will want a wife who will go farther.'

Eva was not quite sure what she meant by going 'farther,' but it sounded well; hopeless for Violet, who would not 'go' at all.

'I 'll tell you all about the meeting to-morrow,' said Mrs. Tremayne, 'and how my speech goes off. I dare say you will have gone to bed by the time we get back, and in any case I shall probably go to bed myself, so don't wait up for us, Violet.'

Violet said that she would not wait up, and she was going to the door when her aunt called her back again.

'Do you mind going to the drawing-room and waiting there till Pansy comes, because I want you to explain to her that Mr. Mossmore is looking over his speech and can't be disturbed? I 'm awfully sorry, as she is coming early on

purpose to talk to him, but it would not be right to interrupt him, so bring her straight up to me, please.'

Violet said she would wait in the drawing-room, and would explain the situation to Lady Peacock; she would also bring her upstairs; and having said this she left the room.

'Not pearls,' said Mrs. Tremayne to her maid; 'emeralds, I think. They look more serious than any other stones, and also go with the green feather.'

There was yet another reason why Mrs. Tremayne approved of the new hat. She thought its price had been three and a half guineas, and Madame Flora had reduced it to three guineas as a special attention to her patroness.

Mrs. Tremayne did not know that this had been no spontaneous act of generosity on the part of Madame Flora. She did not know that the three-guinea ticket had been taken off the hat and a three-and-a-half-guinea ticket put on for her special benefit, as her character for bargaining was well known in the Southdean shops and by Madame Flora. It was a good thing that Mrs. Tremayne could not hear that able Frenchwoman telling her English husband not once, but a hundred times over and over with that ear-breaking and head-

splitting volubility peculiar to the Latin races, the agitating circumstances of the day.

'*Quel horreur* of an election. It is an abomination. Ah, but, ah, but, my poor man, Miss Broadlow came in with leetle Miss Tremayne to say that black confection with the green feather is to be tried on this afternoon 'by Mrs. Tremayne. Very well, what do you want—there comes one, two, twenty customers. They say, "What is your 'usban's politics?" To one I say, "My 'usban' votes not Liberal, but I keep that secret, or Liberal ladies will not of my modes." This is your *horreur* of an election, eh? What do you expect, what do you demand? Miss Tremayne she over'ear and she say bold to me, "Madame Flora, your 'usban' was Liberal las' week." The *gamine*! Now, what do you think? I reply, "You great ladies can do what you like, not we modistes." Eh, *bien*, Miss Broadlow she say kindly, "You say to customers, Madame Flora, that your 'usban' vote for the party which does not frighten modistes." Then she go out with Miss Tremayne. This is not all, not at all. It is much more to follow. Mrs. Tremayne she come in with Lady Peacock—*quelle drôle de femme, cette Peacock*—and Mrs. Tremayne she say, taking off 'er own 'at,

"I am glad to learn that your 'usban' will vote as he ought this election"; and I say, "Madame, my poor leetle 'usban' he vote for the party who protect modistes. I sell 'ats—modes; I do not ask politics of the ladies that buy my 'ats." Ah, was that not bad, eh, *mon pauvre*? Mrs. Tremayne speak very grand. She say, "I am sorry that anybody should be ashamed of their politics." Now, what for an answer was that? It was infamous! Oh, *cette* election! "To oblige madame, I reduce this awfully smart Paris model so low as three guineas," I reply immediate. Lady Peacock, she laugh and say, "If your 'ats are Paris, Madame Flora, it is equal to me what are your 'usban's politics." Ah, she is droll that Peacock with her eyes of *pervenche* and her *jupe* always torn at the back.' And having told this story, Madame Flora still continued telling it.

CHAPTER IV

'WELL, my dear,' said Pansy Lady Peacock, coming into the room with a little flourish, 'you can't say I am unpunctual to-day. So you've put on your war-paint. So have I. That hat *is* a success. It's always safe to get a French model—so say I.'

'It's not bad,' said Mrs. Tremayne. The mere presence of Pansy made her cheerful and a little pleasantly contemptuous. 'It 'll do.'

When she had dismissed her maid she sat on the other side of the fire and looked at Pansy, who as usual took a chair as close to the blaze as was possible and tucked up her skirt.

Pansy Lady Peacock was a little woman, aged forty, and dressed like twenty. Her blue eyes looked wicked and were really quite innocuous. She lived in a villa on the outskirts of Southdean because she could not afford to live anywhere else. As Captain Smith was heard frequently to remark: a thousand a year

when managed by Pansy was four hundred and starvation.

Pansy had thrown herself into Mrs. Tremayne's arms as soon as that lady arrived at Northdean House. The attraction was mutual. Pansy had as dearest pal the most prominent woman in the neighbourhood, except, of course, the Duchess of Sussex, who could scarcely be called a woman; merely an occasional apparition as far as Southdean or Northdean was concerned.

Mrs. Tremayne, on her side, had some one whom she could, if in the mood, treat with disrespectful intimacy. Occasionally she offended Pansy, and there was a split between them for the space of two days; but the friendship was always renewed.

'Well,' said Pansy, 'who do you think that I met on the road?'

'How can I tell?' said Mrs. Tremayne, taking up her paper of notes and looking at them.

'I 'll give you two guesses,' said Pansy.

'I suppose you know that there 's that lecture on "Home Life and Home Influence," by Mrs. Austin Dick, on December 28 at eight o'clock?'

'What, Mrs. Dick!' cried Pansy. 'Don't you remember how she neglected her own boy?

He was always at other people's houses; he was quite a nuisance.'

'She was the only person who wanted to lecture. You were there when we made the arrangements,' said Mrs. Tremayne.

'Was I? "Home Influence"—I call that cheek,' said Pansy.

'I 'm not going,' said Eva. 'I 've just got an invitation to dinner that evening, but you 'll have to go, Pansy. We must sometimes go to the Association's lectures; we 've got to put in an appearance sometimes, when other people hold forth.'

'I don't know whether I can go,' said Pansy.

'You 'll have to go,' said Mrs. Tremayne composedly.

'Well, who do you think I met on the way here?' cried Pansy again.

'I don't know,' said Eva; 'I 've not got second sight.'

'Well, General Briggs.'

'Oh,' said Eva indifferently.

'The dear old man said, "What mischief are you up to, starting out alone from your house at this hour instead of coming back to it to look after your husband's dinner?"

'"Oh," I said, "Ted 's dining at the club."

' " All the worse," said General Briggs.'

Here Pansy laughed a great deal, and having got up a good impetus was obliged to go on till the initial force had subsided. But Eva did not show any sympathy on her side. Pansy started again.

' And I said, " Now, General, don't make any unkind insinuations." Well, then I owned up, honest Indian, and said I was going to the meeting, and first of all to dine with you and Mr. Mossmore. " *The* meeting," he said; " it 's another kind of meeting you 're after." You know what a charming old man the General is ? '

Eva stared hard at her notes, put her pencil between her lips, and frowned.

' I can't see any charm in such rotten talk,' she said rather indistinctly.

' Oh, you 're so frightfully elevated,' said Pansy. ' Everything is silly if you don't do it. Well, what I want to know is what the dear old man meant. He told my cabman to drive on again, before I had time to ask. Now, is there any plot on ? '

Eva raised her brows with a flashing look of scorn.

' A plot ? ' she said.

' I *can't think*,' said Pansy, unabashed. ' Now, has Mr. Mossmore been talking about me ? '

'And if he had?' said Eva.

'Well, then the secret is out,' cried Pansy. 'What 's he been saying? I always repeat to you anything agreeable I hear any one say, and you never tell me anything complimentary people say about me. It really isn't fair.'

'Mr. Mossmore made one remark about you,' said Eva; 'he said that you *and* Miss Jones were charming.'

'Thanks,' said Lady Peacock. 'Thanks extremely.'

Mrs. Tremayne folded her paper.

'Now try and attend to what I say, Pansy. Dr. Barnes, as the Men's President, will take the chair. You know this already, as it 's on all the placards.'

'On the placards, is it?' said Pansy attentively.

'Mr. Mossmore and Mr. Laurence will sit on either side of him. I shall sit next to Mr. Laurence, and you will sit next to Mr. Mossmore. Miss Jones will squeeze in somewhere at one of the corners, and Mrs. Smith will sit behind in the next row. The other members of the executives—men's and women's—will sit anywhere they can. Dick won't go on to the platform, but he will sit in the middle of the first row of the audience. Now, can

you take into your noddle where *you* are to go ? '

' I sit next to the belle of the ball, Mr. Mossmore,' said Pansy. ' I think I can get that into my head, though I 'm not so clever as you are, Eva ; that would be too much for any person to hope for. I shall raise my muff to my lips now and then so as to look as if I was making some 'cute remarks to myself. It doesn't do for us all to sit looking as if we couldn't understand a word of what was being said.'

' Speak for yourself, my dear,' said Eva.

' It doesn't do for us all to look like a lot of dummies,' persisted Pansy.

' Our committee *could* only have been made by " Nature," ' said Eva. ' No *man* in his senses would make plaster women look like that. He would have more taste.'

Later on, when they were going down to dinner, Mrs. Tremayne warned her friend.

' Don't talk about General Briggs, Pansy. Don't talk Southdean gossip, or you 'll only bore Mr. Mossmore.'

' You 're making a mistake, Eva,' said Pansy. ' I 'm sure these clever men prefer gossip. My darling James always did ; so does Ted, only he gets it all at the club, and it 's stale by

the time it reaches you and me. Well, just as you like at your own table, only I can't talk politics. I get mixed when I talk, though when I don't talk I can see it all as plain as anything. That 's funny, isn't it ? '

CHAPTER V

AFTER taking Pansy Lady Peacock safely into Mrs. Tremayne's bedroom, Violet turned down the corridor at the end of the house and went to her own room.

Her bedroom was close to the door leading to the nurseries. It was furnished with miscellaneous articles that Mrs. Tremayne did not want. The wall-paper did not harmonize with the curtains, nor the curtains with the carpet. The washstand was very large, while the dressing-table and wardrobe were very small. The bed was enormous, and the pictures on the walls were faded photographs of places that Tremayne had visited on the one occasion when he went abroad. Mrs. Tremayne thought that Violet would like to have them.

The whole effect of the room Mrs. Tremayne called 'home-like.' Violet did not quite know what her aunt meant, but she was accustomed to hear her use words and phrases in a powerful way, as if settling their application for once and

all. Violet's room, however, was surpassed by the exceeding 'home-likeness' of Molly's.

Molly went to bed at night and got up in the morning surrounded by a desolation of cheap crockery and battered, refractory mahogany. The drawers in one high, narrow chest were a source of perpetual worry both to Molly and to Mrs. Thompson, for they either refused to open at more than one corner or, suddenly relenting, came out with a sudden violence that precipitated the manipulator upon the floor.

That evening Violet dressed with more than usual rapidity. She cleared everything neatly away with her habitual care, but with a restless haste in her movements. She wanted to get away from her toilet as soon as she could. For one only moment she hesitated at the toilet-table, and then she turned to the door and put out the lights. She stood in the corridor thinking. All was silent, except for a faint sound of Molly thumping the cracked nursery piano. Then Violet came back into the room, put up the lights, and closed her door.

The colour had risen in her face as she did this. She went to the toilet-table, and taking a key unlocked a jewel drawer.

She took a case out of the drawer, and opening it drew from it a pearl necklace.

It was the only jewellery she possessed; her mother had sold all except this necklace.

Violet put it round her neck and looked at herself in the mirror. The pearls added a richness to the plain elegance of her white dress. Yes, a richness. What was there wrong in that?

The pearls suggested wealth, prosperity, and she was really poor—very poor. Poor? Was that all? She moved away and walked up and down the room. Why did she want to look prosperous when this necklace was all she had in the world—the only inheritance—except that awful one about which she could not speak, not even to her Uncle Dick?

'There's nothing wrong in wearing my own necklace!' she said to herself as she paced up and down.

She was quite alone in the world—and she always would be, always must be. She had promised to remain solitary, bearing her own burden of inheritance. It was easier to promise that six years ago—easier—when she was only eighteen. Why, then it seemed a sacred duty to take her mother's burden upon her own shoulders; it seemed as if God was with her supporting her when she soothed the dying ears by the promise that that terrible inheritance

should descend no further. She meant to keep that promise, so couldn't she look beautiful and rich if she liked just for a little while? She had borne a good deal already, and even if she took vows at St. Ursula's, even then she would be different from the other sisters; she would have her extra burden to bear; she would be alone in a sadder sense than they were.

Why, then, were these emotions so urgent, so imperative? Did she passionately long to break her promise? She went back to the toilet-table and tried to control her thoughts. God was near at hand; she must find Him; she must have His help. He would answer her. Closing her eyes and leaning her hands on the table she uttered a formless prayer for patience, tranquillity. It is difficult to pray when the knees are trembling and the heart beating. After a minute or two she raised her head. God had answered her. She unfastened the necklace!

She put it into the case and put the case back into the drawer and locked it. She was strong now, she was acting under the guidance of His will; her emotions stood aside and submitted.

But she wanted to speak to nobody for a few minutes. She wanted to be alone. Her room was very cold. A fire was one of the luxuries her aunt could not afford to give other people.

She went downstairs into the hall. In the drawing-room she would be able to be alone for a few minutes.

Crossing the hall she came upon Mr. Mossmore. He was carrying his typed speech in his hand.

'You 're not coming this evening?' he said. 'You 've had enough of my speech—too much.' He stood facing her, waiting for a reply. She must pass him as quickly as she could without rudeness.

'It isn't that,' she said. 'I don't often go to meetings; and there isn't room in the car.'

She moved towards the door of the drawing-room, and Mossmore instead of going upstairs, which was what he had evidently intended, followed her.

'And what about your criticism, Miss Broadlow; you promised me some,' he said, 'didn't you?'

'It is the last thing I should have promised,' said the girl, smiling a little; 'my criticism wouldn't be of any use. I don't know anything about politics.'

'Most people aren't as candid as you are,' said Mossmore.

He closed the door behind him and watched her as she went slowly to the other end of the

room. She was very hard to draw out; most young women would have been extremely flattered at his request for criticism.

'You are disappointed with politics?' he questioned.

She might well be if she heard nothing more solid than the effusions of Mrs. Tremayne.

'Perhaps I expected too much,' said Violet. 'I got a wrong idea of them—a long time ago.'

Mossmore pursed up his lips.

'When you meditated upon politics in your cradle,' he said, 'you pronounced them to be the noble art of statesmanship. Now you know more about the world, you are more sceptical. You see that you expected too much of human nature—a long time ago!'

Violet could not help smiling at him. After a moment's silence she said a little abruptly, 'But you expect a good deal?'

'I?' said Mossmore, raising his eyebrows at her with curious surprise.

'Yes,' said the girl a little nervously.

'Miss Broadlow,' he replied with a sly smile, 'I must accuse you of gross flattery.'

'It is not flattery,' said Violet, a little frightened at herself.

He turned over the pages of his speech, affecting an air of petulant and yet anxious inquiry,

in order to put this singular young woman at her ease and draw another smile from her.

'Not flattery! Then the criticism is coming at last. Where 's the weak spot? Which page?'

'It 's the last two pages—principally,' she said, and her voice was a little shaky from nervousness.

'The last two pages are the worst—about the sacred will of the People?'

'Yes,' said Violet.

He turned to the last page but one and began reading a paragraph in a loud impassioned voice of unction. Then he suddenly stopped his fooling and said:—

'And why isn't the will of the People sacred?' He spoke in a conciliatory tone.

'Because we 're so ignorant,' said Violet, 'and—so stupid—and it 's so hard to do what is right.'

Mossmore closed his speech very slowly and rolled it up in his hand.

'And the sort of people who believe their will is sacred are just the kind of people who——' Here she hesitated.

'Who are more blamed fools than other fools,' said Mossmore. 'But, my dear Miss Broadlow, politics are business, and it isn't the business of the politician to tell his audience the truth

about themselves. His business is to put before them certain measures and induce them to support these measures. The People is now the sovereign power, and sovereigns have always been flattered in order to be guided. Coarse tools have to be used for coarse purposes. We have got to hew the misshapen mass of human society into some resemblance to an ideal.'

'An ideal?' said Violet questioningly.

'To use a grand word,' said Mossmore. 'Shall I speak to you with absolute unreserve?'

His tone was profoundly flattering. Violet coloured a little and said 'Yes.'

'Very well,' he said. 'Remember that I speak to you, not to any one else. Human society is improving, not because human nature is any better than it was, but because now we are beginning to protect, not some men against some other men, but each man against his brother man. Greed and tyranny are inherent qualities of human nature. The poor have it in them as strongly as the rich, but they have less opportunity for showing it. The aim of the politician is to guide the community towards a just balance of powers, in other words, to cut the claws of human nature and to draw its teeth. My belief is that we are now approaching a time

when one of two things must happen. I will tell you what they are. We may be approaching a social millennium which will be a paradise of comfortable moral and physical mediocrity, in which we shall all be well-fed, healthy citizens occupied with infinitesimal jealousies and minute ambitions, and ruled by an enormous bureaucracy that can only exist by pleasing us and cajoling us. This seems to me one possible future lying before us. The other is a more sinister one.

'The old order *has* changed, the great feudal system is over, and the present system of plutocracy seems doomed to follow it: I don't think it can be propped up. It does not seem to be the aim of Evolution to preserve races, or even communities. Her aim seems to be to allow them a term only of existence, and when England is more "socialized" than it is at present we may find ourselves unable to compete with countries that still retain some of the commercial vigour that seems to belong to a flourishing plutocracy.

'Frankly, I don't think Evolution may care for Socialism. It isn't virtue that Evolution is after, nor justice; it is certain successful embodiments of Energy that it favours.

'Meanwhile the politician has to talk and act

for the present and to make the best of the tendencies of his age. This can't be done by trying to turn sinners into saints. They won't turn. What we have to do is to make one sinner keep another sinner in order. We have to get those who don't want to drink to carry temperance reform. We have to get those who don't want to live a loose life to press for national purity. We have to get those who hold industrial capital to vote against the landlord. We have got to get those who hold no capital at all to vote against the monopolies of the industrial capitalist. Also we have got to get the healthy to vote for the segregation of the diseased! Why, Miss Broadlow, I trust no man to *act* against his personal interest or his passions. I say, I trust no man.'

Violet's eyes were now fixed on the ground. She did not answer.

'I trust no man,' said Mossmore, 'not because men are, what you say they are, ignorant and stupid, but because they are selfish. The most enlightened knowledge does not make a man just.

'Think! The man of science who has talked and written about the problem of heredity can no more be trusted to refrain from marrying a woman who comes from an insane stock than

if he were an Irish peasant taught by his priest to regard disease as the arbitrary will of God.'

Violet still stood staring at the carpet, and when at last she raised her eyes there was in them a look of pathetic entreaty.

Mossmore went a step towards her.

'I 've said too much,' he said.

'No, no,' she answered as she moved away.

'I have wounded your feelings—about human nature,' he said.

But it was too late for her answer. Voices were heard outside. The door opened, and Pansy came in, followed by her hostess.

So here was Violet talking alone to Mr. Mossmore after all.

CHAPTER VI

MRS. TREMAYNE had intended keeping the conversation in her own hands in order to prevent the irresponsible Pansy from lowering the reputation of the Southdean Women's Liberal Association.

But Pansy was exhilarated by Mossmore's good looks and sympathetic manner. She insisted on telling a long story about her gardener, who said he was a 'Conservatory' and not a Liberal.

Pansy enjoyed the joke about 'conservatory' all the more keenly because she herself had found the pronunciation as well as the spelling of the English language an insoluble enigma.

For instance, it was not until Lord Peacock was dead—and buried—that she discovered the real difference between 'cemetery' and 'symmetry.' Many other words and pairs of words she never did understand; they remained a lifelong source of mystery to her.

Pansy found her 'conservatory' story so

much appreciated by Mossmore that she told it all over again, under the impression that she was giving her audience pleasure.

Mrs. Tremayne darted covert fierce looks at her, but Pansy's powers of observation were momentarily drowned in success and her host's excellent champagne.

Mossmore, as it happened, was glad to have the talk kept going without any effort on his part; his mind was full of his own private thoughts. He was watching Violet closely without looking straight at her. He knew he had given her pain. She had outwardly recovered from it, but it might still be rankling in her mind against him.

What was the exact blunder he had made? Why was she so reserved? And yet he liked her all the better for her reserve. A talking man rarely admires a talking woman. He knows what talking is worth. There was something in Violet that attracted him strangely. She would make a very excellent wife for any politician who happened to be wanting one. She had apparently no fads and there was no sentimental nonsense about her. As to himself, he might never marry, but if he did it would not be to a woman who wanted to be prominent either by being very busy or very funny. He

would marry some one well born, well bred, reserved, and yet tactful.

One more point: he would not marry a woman with 'enlightened views.' His wife would have to believe in a future life and in the immortality of the soul; not because those beliefs had any scientific value or any particular philosophical value, but because those beliefs, if taken seriously in a hopeful spirit and not dogmatically, made women heroic, scrupulous, and also tender.

He must contrive to see Violet alone, if only for five minutes, and say something that would make her forgive him.

As everybody was in a hurry Mrs. Tremayne and Pansy smoked at the table, and as soon as coffee was finished they all rose together and left the dining-room. Violet went into the drawing-room; Mossmore went upstairs to fetch his speech. When he came down again he found Mrs. Tremayne and Pansy in the hall waiting for their cloaks.

He passed them.

'The car will be here in three minutes,' said Mrs. Tremayne.

'Three minutes—thanks,' he said, as if she had given him special permission. 'I 'm going to thank Miss Broadlow for typing out my

speech. I had forgotten to do it,' and he went towards the drawing-room door.

Mossmore walked into the drawing-room, pulling the door behind him almost to, but not quite.

Violet was sitting near the fire, with a light burning by her shoulder, doing some needlework. She was sewing some lace on a handkerchief for her aunt. The rest of the room was in shadow, the firelight falling warmly on the carpet and on the girl's white dress.

She turned and looked at him. He came up with the speech in his hand, in no hurry, but evidently with the intention of speaking to her.

She dropped the work she was doing.

'I should like to show you how much I appreciate your point of view, Miss Broadlow, by sacrificing my splendid eulogy of the sovereign People. It is a sacrifice—and how the dickens I 'm going to wind up without it I don't know—but I shall get some inspiration, I hope, from your approval.' He tore out the last two sheets, and crumpling them up threw them into the fire with the air of a genial impulsive boy.

He put a touch of melodrama into it, because he was a born actor. His voice, movements, his words, were always calculated to rouse the sympathy of the onlooker.

The paper flared. Mossmore fell on his knees, and seizing the poker held the paper down. It roared and tried to rise and slip up the chimney.

Violet leaned forward in her chair, her lips parted, staring at the flames. Then she saw figures at the door. It was her Aunt Eva and Lady Peacock. They were speaking to her. She started and her cheeks flushed red.

'Are you setting the house on fire, Mr. Mossmore?' cried Pansy as she pulled on her gloves.

'No,' said Mossmore, rising very deliberately to his feet, 'I have only been setting fire to my own brains.'

He met Mrs. Tremayne's eyes.

'Your niece,' he said, 'calls my splendid electoral peroration mere tub-thumping, so I 'm burning it.'

What outrageous flattery! A wave of passionate indignation—of jealousy swept over Eva. She controlled herself outwardly.

'As long as the house is safe, that 's all right,' she said. 'Pansy, get along into the car. Come along, Mr. Mossmore, we ought to be going. Good-night, Violet, as we shan't see you again.'

What could possess a man of great political importance to make such a fool of himself—

submitting himself to the criticism of a girl who knew nothing? Eva's blood was still tingling at the thought!

Tremayne was already outside speaking to the chauffeur, and Pansy had got into the car and was looking out at them.

'Give me your arm,' said Eva to Mossmore, 'I do hate these circular steps.'

Mossmore gave his arm.

'I 'm going to scold you,' she said in his ear, 'for agitating our poor Violet about politics. She has to be kept very quiet. I dare say you don't know the sad fact that her father, Sir James Broadlow, died mad, and that her only brother is in an asylum. We have to be very careful of Violet.'

As Eva spoke she felt a strange sudden conviction that hitherto they had not been careful enough of Violet. In fact, the girl was a very great responsibility—to her.

She could feel Mossmore's arm relax. She glanced at his profile in the imperfect light. His features were set and his eyes hard. He had suddenly become a very formidable-looking man.

'I don't think Miss Broadlow is easily agitated,' he said in a voice that forbade any further discussion of the subject.

Eva got into the car and shrank into her corner beside Pansy.

It was not her fault that the Broadlows were all mad. She did not make them; in fact, she had suffered through them. Dick had dumped down Violet on them without any proper reason.

She sat back with her eyes lowered so as to avoid meeting Mossmore's just then.

Fortunately she was not opposite to him; she was opposite to her husband.

It was really too bad of Dick to have burdened her with Violet. But then Dick was always so sentimental.

Why was her husband so sentimental? She had discovered it during their engagement. In a foolish moment of enthusiasm and confidence he had told her about some of his old childish thoughts and fancies. He had wearied her with a description of that little old cove below the straw-stack where he used to paddle as a child. It was all about the battered old boat, and the battered old breakwater encircled with green slime and with mussels and barnacles.

He had bored her frightfully that day by telling her that the disappointment of his childhood was that he could find no shells among the pebbles of that cove; how he was haunted by a dream that he climbed over the old breakwater

one moonlight night when the tide was low, and rounding the head of cliff he found, to his surprise and joy, a narrow strip of sand strewn with the brilliant empty houses of those strange minute people of the sea. He had told Eva that he still dreamed that dream, and Eva had thought it remarkably silly of him.

She was ashamed at such a confession of humble imagining. This dream of Dick's was not at all the sort of dream that the frequenters of the County Club probably had after spending their evenings over Bridge enlightened by whisky and soda.

The shame of it had rankled in her mind till she happened to hear Dick damning very thoroughly an impertinent stranger who persisted in doing some 'drawing' of his own at the covert side. After that she almost forgave him.

Just now, as the car glided over the dark, narrow road to Southdean, Eva thought of this 'silly' side to her husband's character. She looked out at the darkness of the night and resented many things in her life—Violet among them. Then why not help the girl to get married and be rid of her? Married? To a country rector—yes! To a poor man whom she could patronize—yes; but not to Mossmore,

not to a future Cabinet Minister, while she, Eva Tremayne, remained buried on the desolate fringe of the Sussex Downs married to a harmless little husband who hunted the fox three times a week and the rest of the week collected flints—and by night dreamed of picking up sea-shells.

CHAPTER VII

CONTRARY to her usual habit when guests were in the house, Mrs. Tremayne did not go into the smoke-room. She said that the meeting had been an unparalleled success, thanks to Mr. Mossmore, but that she was awfully tired. The 'strenuousness' of election time took it out of her. Mossmore knew perfectly well why the election time had taken it out of her on that particular evening. It was true that the meeting had been a success. Mossmore had spoken in his best platform style. He had begun on a high moral level, as if he and his audience were great sober statesmen busied about the salvation of the English people. He had then touched upon several statistical points affecting the measures put before the public by his party. But the attention of the audience could not be expected to stand the strain of any systematic thought for more than a few minutes, and Mossmore knew this. He had soon descended from his pedestal, and had proceeded in a light

vein of good-humoured banter to expose some of the superficial weaknesses in the armour of the 'enemy.' The hecklers Mossmore had disposed of with a jaunty and genial self-assurance. He did not wind up with his intended eulogy of the 'People,' but he uttered some splendid scorn for the incurable stupidity of his opponents, which did as well.

A political audience does not want to be made to think, it wants to be entertained by a judicious mixture of sentiment and fun, and it burst from that hot, crowded hall exhilarated by the discovery that it is not self-sacrifice or moral effort that makes for progress so much as the constant insistence that a man 's a man for a' that and a' that, etc.

And this political thesis was not merely expounded by Mossmore in order to electrify his hearers and rouse their passions; he believed it himself. He really believed that a man is, unfortunately, a man and nothing better, and that a man's only safeguard against the injustice of his fellow-man is a well-balanced give-and-take.

The day before the Unionists had had their big meeting; they had been addressed by an extremely dull speaker, who had also blundered into the announcement that his party was

strongly in favour of a tax which would lower the pockets of the Southdean shopkeepers. No preparation could have been better for the Liberal meeting. It seemed as if Providence was fighting for them.

If Laurence was returned, which seemed possible, a good deal of the credit would be given to Mossmore—a very great deal.

Mossmore lit a cigar and lay back in his chair. Political success was all very well, but man is more than a political animal, and Mossmore's stay at Northdean House had been a success only in the political sense. He had not recovered from the unpleasant shock given him by Mrs. Tremayne when they went together down the steps from the hall door. Mossmore's self-will was still smarting, the pleasant picture painted by his facile imagination had been scored across.

He was not sure that the wound was not almost a personal one.

How was he to get rid of this sense of physical —well, not perhaps pain, but discomfort? Mossmore watched his host lighting a pipe. What could have induced that upright little man to marry a neurotic busybody like Mrs. Tremayne?

Tremayne was as simple as a child. He might just as easily have married a nice woman if

she had been good-looking, but Eva Tremayne was on the spot. He had no insight into character. To label a person as good, bad, or indifferent seemed to Tremayne a very unnecessary and a very unpleasant thing to do.

He was looking uncommonly cheerful that evening, for, contrary to his expectations, he had thoroughly enjoyed the meeting. He had been for some time past a little frightened at the vagaries of his own party; his fears slumbered for the moment. He had been very much impressed by the lofty tone of his wife's little speech; he was very proud. After all, the Liberals did seem, as of old, to have a monopoly of the virtues. As to Mossmore, Tremayne beamed upon him that evening. Mossmore was a most amusing, a most witty chap, as well as being, of course, most weighty and statesmanlike. He really was a very notable personage; and what a kindly interest he was taking in Molly, asking questions about her, and about Violet too. In spite of his knock-about life, what a simple gentleman Mossmore was. Yes, Violet was a Tremayne, every inch of her, in character too. This he said with a certain emphasis to Mossmore when somehow the conversation had turned upon exactly that point.

'Violet is taller than our women have been, but she's a Tremayne of the Tremaynes. Molly, on the other hand, is like her mother.'

'Miss Broadlow climbs like a deer; that needs strength as well as go,' said Mossmore reflectively.

'Strong? She's strong enough,' said Tremayne rather eagerly. He left the hearthrug and seated himself on the other side of the fire opposite Mossmore. His keen, blue huntsman's eyes looked straight out from his thin face. It pleased him greatly to speak of Violet and have her spoken of so cheerfully. Everything was going well that night. Mossmore on his side had got all the information he wanted. He read his host's mind too well to treat him to second-hand tally-ho stories, or to spoil the effect of the evening by starting political discussions in which Tremayne was not really interested. It was practically the first opportunity he had had of talking alone with his host, and he launched straight into the question of the archæology of the Downs. He talked about barrows, camps, and flints. Mossmore had the demagogue's genius for making a very little knowledge go a very long way. He knew little about the ancient Briton or the prehistoric man, but he had the knack of appropriating at lightning

speed the stored-up treasures of another man's mental wardrobe, so that he, so to speak, walked arm-in-arm with Tremayne, stealing from him as they walked and decking himself out in the stolen clothes, marching along as if he had never been in a state of intellectual nudity. Mossmore added also a rich suggestiveness of his own, and by the time that he rose to say good-night Tremayne was full of admiration and astonishment that so busy a public man had found leisure to learn so much about the ancient world.

The clock in the smoke-room mantelpiece struck one.

'What an evening we 've had,' said Tremayne. 'When can you come down to see us again?'

Poor Tremayne had not the faintest suspicion that in his wife's opinion Mossmore was as much an affair of the past as was the bishop and the rector of Southdean. He did not make the discovery till later. A suspicion of the truth did not dawn upon him even when on the following morning his wife did not come down to breakfast. Though of extraordinarily robust constitution, and able to hunt all day and dance all night when occasion required, Eva was still suffering from the effects of a two hours' meeting. She sent down a message asking

Miss Violet to come to her room as soon as possible after breakfast.

Eva Tremayne had opened her morning letters, and had thrown them aside—all except one.

A dull sense of the futility of life, and disagreeable recollections of Mossmore, had seized her on waking, and had decided her to remain in her room till he had gone.

She was lying back on her pillows now, her breakfast-tray before her. Life was beginning to look brighter on account of the letter she had retained in her hand. If she had known that this letter was on its way to her she would have slept better. Politics were important, of course, but they were not the only business of the world; there were a hundred other things as important, a hundred other interests, a hundred other vital questions. Education was supremely important. The Teachers' Association of Southdean had requested her to address them on any topic she liked to choose. This letter conveyed the invitation.

What should she speak to them about? She rather thought she would give them an address on 'The Modern Woman as a Moral Force.' She would introduce the subject by speaking of her own education, which had been

modern — French and German, Arithmetic, Chemistry, Physiology, Botany, History, Drawing, Geography, English Literature, Astronomy, Grammar, and Economics.

It would be a good opportunity to say a word for boys' modern education—how sorely it was needed. Until they dropped the study of classics and had the same modern advantages as she herself had, the results of which were so striking, little hope could be entertained of their full mental development.

Teachers of the modern girl could congratulate themselves that they were in the van of educational progress, that they were the pioneers of a stupendous educational betterment of the race.

But this was not all. They had before them a vast field of truly noble and progressive work in the moral sphere. They had to mould the very souls, so to speak, of the children confided to their care.

Mrs. Tremayne thought of the rows of badly dressed women, ranging from twenty to fifty, whom she would be addressing.

She must speak to them as if they were actually real human beings; talk to them very simply and directly (possibly in that new hat) about moral needs, moral duties—all that makes for the uplifting of human life. She hoped that some

of them, at least, would go away strengthened for their daily work.

Mrs. Tremayne began jotting down notes on the back of the letter in her hand, and was still doing it when Violet came to her bedside.

Eva fell back on her pillows and smiled languidly.

'Well, Violet, it really went off very well, though I think of the two Mr. Laurence spoke best—more to the point, though very, very short. I got on all right. I expect your Uncle Dick has told you. And now here is fresh work. Is *he* gone?'

She spoke as if she expected he had gone long ago.

'Mr. Mossmore?' said Violet. 'He is going in a few minutes. Uncle Dick isn't going with him because Mr. Laurence is going to meet him at the station and see him off.'

Eva looked the girl carefully over and decided that she was pale—for her.

'Would you mind typing my answer to the Southdean Teachers' Association, Violet? I will dictate it just now. There 's paper on the table.'

Violet got paper and borrowed her aunt's pencil. She wrote her aunt's words down rapidly.

'She 's in a hurry,' thought Eva. The sound of the motor-car was heard under the windows. Mrs. Tremayne seemed to be unconscious of it.

'I haven't said good-bye to Mr. Mossmore,' said the girl suddenly.

'Didn't you say good-bye before coming up here?' demanded her aunt in surprise.

'No,' said Violet. 'I thought—— What message shall I take from you?'

'Oh,' said Eva, 'my apologies for being so stupid as to be tired. Thank him very warmly for all he has done. Really very important work,' she added in a perfunctory tone, as if she had almost forgotten that it was important.

Violet was going when her aunt called her back and raised herself in bed.

'Wait a moment. I particularly want to send down to him—well—a book I promised. Now, what is the name of it and where is it? You know, Violet?'

Violet didn't know what book her aunt meant. She was already at the door, her hand on the handle turning it.

'You remember the day I lost my purse somewhere in the library, and I said that I laid it on the top of some books—only I hadn't?'

Violet was now trembling in every limb.

Mrs. Tremayne saw it and became more persistent in her talk.

'Wait, and I shall recall it; it was one of those books. Wait, look in that bottom drawer, Violet, right-hand side of the dressing-table. No? Well, then, the other side. You know I haven't any memory for where I put things, and Amelia is too stupid for words. Hunt through all the drawers, please.'

Violet was hunting, her fingers icy and her head burning hot.

'I can't find it,' she said. 'It 's not here. I 'm afraid I can't wait.'

'If it 's not there—how exasperating!—look in the wardrobe—somewhere on the floor of it. You know how I fling things into other things. When one's mind is strenuously occupied one does that,' and Mrs. Tremayne closed her eyes with vexation and sank back on her pillows.

Then came the sound of motor wheels on the gravel.

'What nonsense!' cried Eva. 'What a hurry the man is in! I shall have to send the book by post. I think he might have waited to say good-bye.'

The flush on Violet's cheeks had died away. She left the room without speaking. She ran

downstairs very silently and swiftly. At the foot of the stairs she stopped. What was the good of running? He had gone.

The servants had gone; Tremayne stood alone on the steps, looking after the car as it sped down the drive.

Hearing Violet's steps behind him he said, 'Why didn't you come down in time to say good-bye?' Then he turned and saw Violet's face. She looked as if she was going to faint.

He went up and put his arms round her. They stood together for a moment, motionless and silent, her head bent down to his shoulder.

He thought he understood.

'Poor little girl, poor little girl,' he said at last.

Violet pressed her face against his neck.

'Don't pity me, dear, don't pity me.'

'Poor child,' he went on.

'It does me harm to pity me,' she said. 'I can't explain, but I meant to do wrong—and didn't—because I had no time. Don't pity me, dear.'

He only drew her closer. Wrong! How pathetic it sounded from her lips.

'Anything that concerns you concerns me,' he said. 'You are not quite happy, Violet?'

She lifted her head and looked down at him with her lips smiling and her eyes misty with tears.

'Quite happy, dear, quite happy, only very silly, and not worth any pity.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE world in which Mossmore lived very nearly satisfied him. He was the very opposite of a hermit and a recluse. If he had been given the option of saving his soul in the wilderness, or of living in the tents of wickedness and going to hell afterwards, he would have chosen the latter course; and he would have gone about the country preaching with irresistible eloquence that hell was the one place which the British Electorate must vote for if they were on the side of progress and the free expression of the genius of the 'People.'

Not that Mossmore had actually been given the option and that he was dwelling in the tents of wickedness. He was not; he was living in respectable society, where elemental passions played a subordinate part compared to that played by social competition.

Which of the two spheres of social life is nearest to the kingdom of heaven is a matter for pious reflection, but there is no doubt about which is nearest to political advancement.

The life of the Law Courts with its remorseless exposure of the sordid side of human character; the world of politics with its wheels within wheels, a machine which crushes out of most men the finer sort of honesty; all the rush and tumble of active public life, in which there are pit-falls to be avoided and prizes to be won—*pro bono publico*,—all this neither shocked Mossmore's feelings nor deluded him into the supposition that this world is the best possible kind.

It was as good as could be expected. It was only when the day was done, Courts closed, meetings over, the sittings, the gossip, and the political tittle-tattle of the lobbies or the crowded drawing-rooms silenced, and Mossmore sat down at midnight alone in his chambers to look over his papers for the next day, that the stillness of the night possessed him, and he knew that though a man may talk and talk with the swarming humanity around him, the sound is unsubstantial, it dies away, and is forgotten in the enormous unreality of the past. To Mossmore the *enigma* of life was not sin, not failure or success, but the indifference that each man feels even to his own past, an indifference expressed in that stinging phrase, 'Call no man happy till he is dead,' as if no step in the ladder

of time counted except the last. The present has no care and no gratitude for the past, and the future derides the present. What to any of us are the warring passions, the failures, the successes, nay, the very finest efforts towards moral progress of ancient cities now lying under centuries of dust?

And, moreover, life lasts such a short time. In twenty-five years Mossmore would be an old man. Five-and-twenty years is a long time. Long, when it is going at lightning speed?

It was at night that Mossmore felt that there would come a time when he would be too old or too ill to take life humorously, and his mind went back to that drawing-room at Northdean and a girl sitting alone there sewing a handkerchief.

He was not in love with her—not as he had been with women—though at no moment in the past had Mossmore ever allowed emotions to interfere with what he considered more important and permanent matters. He had always been secretly amused at a certain dry little Cabinet Minister who, when he fell in love, which he had done more than once, could think of nothing else, and for six months at a time would be practically useless to his colleagues.

He was not in love with Violet, but he had

decided that she was the kind of woman he preferred to any other. Mrs. Tremayne had maliciously blurred his pleasant picture. He knew now what had caused that tragic look in the girl's eyes. He had practically forbidden her to marry. The worst of it was that she had given him no chance of speaking to her again and reassuring her, and making amends for such an atrocious blunder. It would be a difficult matter—a delicate matter—but he was quite sure he *could* allay all the suffering he had caused her, and *could* put things straight. He would find the right argument and the right note. He longed to do it. She was the very last person in the world he wished to hurt—the very last!

When the result of the election was declared he might possibly get a line from Tremayne and a pressing invitation; yes, in spite of Mrs. Tremayne. He would not have long to wait.

He did not have long to wait. The by-election at Southdean was gained by the Liberals, and Mossmore had gathered one more testimonial to his ability to control public affairs. The news of Laurence's victory was conveyed to Mossmore by a wire from the victor; and a wire of congratulation came from Tremayne, but it contained no

allusion to the proposed visit to Northdean House. What was to be done ?

Mossmore found time to go to the Athenæum Club and hunt up an anthropologist of some note who knew some facts about prehistoric man that other anthropologists seriously doubted.

Mossmore, armed with advice, sent a pamphlet to Tremayne along with a brief note thanking him for his wire and hoping that the household at Northdean were in the best of health.

In return came a grateful letter from Tremayne about prehistoric man, but no invitation to Northdean.

Again, what was to be done ?

While he meditated a letter came from Laurence asking him to come down with him to Southdean for a couple of nights, and proposing the following Saturday to Monday. Mossmore replied that he would come on the following Saturday till Sunday evening.

Probably Tremayne would be asked to meet him, and anyhow he would call at Northdean House on Sunday afternoon.

Mossmore went down to Southdean with more than his usual buoyant sense of exhilaration that ' things would go right.'

In Laurence's big library overlooking the parade and the sea, Mossmore, just arrived,

stood by the fire warming his hands, while Laurence, an elderly likeable person, with scholarly tastes and no sense of humour, stood looking on.

'The only person who has failed me is Tremayne,' said Laurence cheerfully, for he was still in the first glow of victory. He had only been a member of the House of Commons three weeks.

'Oh, Tremayne,' said Mossmore meditatingly, 'has failed you.'

'Everybody else I wanted to meet you can come. Tremayne had accepted, but before he knew that his wife had asked people to dinner this evening. It was unfortunate.'

'Quite a pity,' said Mossmore thoughtfully.

'Next to you,' said Laurence, in good spirits, 'I think that we all owe a debt of gratitude to Mrs. Tremayne. She carried on the campaign in a most spirited manner, rallying our forces and charging the enemy to good purpose.'

'She has a real grasp of political ideas,' said Mossmore, rubbing his hands together at the blaze.

'She 's a wonderful woman,' said Laurence.

This was a bad beginning.

However, there was still Sunday afternoon. It was his duty to go and call at Northdean

House whether Mrs. Tremayne wanted to see him or not.

On Sunday morning Laurence announced his intention of going to church. He said that now he was their member he meant to be very regular and set a good example whenever he was at Southdean.

'I quite recognize the fact,' said Laurence, who was in the hall looking on while his silk hat was being brushed, 'that in some ways it is a political advantage to a man to be a Non-conformist. Accident of birth and education, however, have made me a Churchman.'

'On the other hand,' said Mossmore, leading the way to the door, 'there is a large section of the community that prefer you to be an atheist and to pretend to black your own boots.'

Laurence took the remark with his usual gravity. He explained to Mossmore that he had, he thought, made a successful compromise between dissent and extreme sacerdotalism by choosing a church close at hand that was built of red brick and was neither high nor low nor yet broad.

The building indeed seemed to Mossmore to be entirely devoid of what might be called the religious spirit. It was built of red brick

playfully variegated with squares and stripes of blue and white.

Laurence entered this building alone. The little marble pulpit was supported by twelve machine-made apostles, nine elderly with beards, three young without beards. The incumbent was himself elderly and wore a beard; he was also bald, and had a slight impediment in his speech, being unable to pronounce 'r's' or 'l's,' nor was he able to substitute any other articulate sound in their places.

He had a gift—not so rare after all—of making everything he mentioned seem incredibly dreary and insignificant. His sermons were lengthy, dispiriting descriptions of what had already been laid before the congregation in the gospel of the day. Why he had ever undertaken the cure of the human soul instead of adding up figures in a bank, was impossible for an outsider to determine.

Mossmore had left his host at the church door. The morning was so exquisite that he wanted to spend it out of doors. The sky was blue, the air was dry, still, and keenly frosty, though December was only half-way through.

The sea was blue and very still. Miniature long rollers curled over and flattened themselves on the ice-cold pebbly beach with sudden little

claps, only to be sucked back again over the glittering stones and lost in the peaceful whole.

Mossmore bought a Sunday paper out of curiosity and opened it as he walked along. It contained a rich list of horrors for the people's home reading. On the first page was a short article on Mrs. Tremayne's noble work in the political world, and mention was made of a 'brilliant little paper called *Hearts and Hands*, edited by Mrs. Tremayne's clever thirteen-year-old daughter, who bids fair to equal her mother in ability and keenness for the commonweal.' Farther down the page were some kindly phrases, like 'More bread for the wee ones at home,' 'Peace for tottering old age,' etc.

Mossmore was folding the paper up when his eye caught a figure that he knew coming rapidly towards him.

It was Pansy Lady Peacock. She was looking very wickedly out of her furs; for she had already recognized Mossmore. A tall, distinguished-looking man was not a common object often to be seen on the parade at Southdean.

She took her hand from her muff and held it out to him. Her wrist was weighted by a little case containing a prayer-book, a hymn-book that didn't match, because she had lost the

original one, and sixpence in a minute bag—a Bridge purse with the string cut off.

'How delightful!' she said, pressing Mossmore's hand and wondering what Eva Tremayne would think if she saw.

'You 're late for church,' said Mossmore, 'if you 're going to the red-brick one.'

'I know,' she replied. 'I forgot my handkerchief, and had to go back. Do you never forget anything?'

'Never,' said Mossmore.

'Then come to lunch with me,' said Pansy. 'Oh, I forgot Ted has gone up to General Briggs and is lunching with him. Never mind. Do come and hear all the gossip of Southdean. Now if Eva was here I shouldn't talk like this; but she isn't here.' She glanced over her shoulder.

Mossmore couldn't come to lunch—he was lunching out with Laurence—but an idea struck him.

'I 'll come after lunch,' he said, 'if you promise that your husband won't be there.'

Pansy was delighted at the impropriety of the remark and promised. 'Later on in the afternoon I have to call at Northdean,' he said.

She opened her blue eyes very wide and then

closed them altogether. Then she opened them again to see how Mossmore looked. He looked perfectly imperturbable.

'Au revoir,' she said, and nodding her head she went off.

She was in the best of spirits. She would be able to tell Ted that she had spent her Sunday afternoon with the best-looking man in the House of Commons. This would be a good set-off against the most unreasonable bit of temper Ted had shown to her that morning, merely because she had bought him a large stock of collars without reference to the size of his neck. She was very glad that Eva had made her co-secretary of the S.W.L.A. along with Miss Jones. It was such a pleasure to work for men, there was such a *je ne sais quoi* about them.

Pansy had told Mossmore not to forget. It was not likely that he would forget. The call on her would allow him to shed Laurence off after the luncheon party. He could then go alone to Northdean House. This was his plan. It was quite evident that Pansy 'knew something,' so to speak, but Mossmore did not care what she knew. He had come down to Southdean not to see Mrs. Tremayne—not even to see good old hen-pecked Tremayne—but

to see Miss Broadlow and to heal the wound that he had unwittingly made.

Lady Peacock's villa was of red brick with rustic porch, and an old-world rose-bed in front, now crusted with frost.

The maid who came to the door flung it open, and gazed past Mossmore as if in search of some other object of interest. She said that her ladyship was at home in an off-hand tone, and allowed Mossmore to enter.

The hall was decorated by a great artificial palm that was only occasionally dusted. Pansy loved real plants and real flowers; she loved real wild flowers, above everything else, the only objection to them being that they died if they were not watered.

Mossmore noticed a stuffed box couch that gaped because things had been flung inside that would not, somehow, go down into it. Behind it was hung a richly embroidered crimson curtain, the bottom of which had been gnawed by Pansy's dog. There was a gilt-handled presentation sword in a glass case. The glass was splintered at the end, and just behind the damaged glass the sword had suffered from exposure, but the rest of it was in splendid condition. A portrait of a young gentleman in side whiskers with his busby on one side hung on one of the

walls. It was seamed across and across by the ravages of time and damp, and on the cornice ledge of tarnished gilt frame was lodged a cigarette holder that Pansy treasured and valued. She had lost it some months ago; indeed, she never found it again.

Mossmore was shown into the drawing-room. Pansy was expecting him. She was sitting by the fire smoking. Near her was an easy-chair that she had pulled up, and in it she had placed a cigarette box, a box of matches, and an ash-tray. She swept these on to the floor and made Mossmore sit down.

On the fender was a coffee-pot in which Pansy was brewing coffee for Mossmore. He refused it, however, and took a cigarette.

Without looking Mossmore could see that the room wore an air of untidy, not to say dirty, luxuriousness. There were several old *Daily Mirrors* and a new *Queen* lying about; also there was one book. Pansy had read that book long ago during the solemn enthusiasm of her engagement to Ted Smith. She had never read another; but she kept the book by her, and occasionally asked people if they had read it, and if they hadn't, strongly recommended them to read it, as it was really worth the trouble.

It was characteristic of Pansy that, having just been obliged to buy a wedding present for some relative, she had chosen something that she would have liked herself, and she had been wearing it for a week or two. It was a thin gold chain set with turquoises; it suited her pale grey voile gown.

Pansy had felt very cheerful, not to say skittish, a moment before Mossmore arrived, but now that he was sitting beside her, his handsome mobile face turned in her direction, it made her think of all the sacred past with Lord Peacock and the inexpressibly happy days that were and wouldn't be again. Somehow she could not help giving expression to these feelings. She asked Mossmore if he had noticed the portrait of Lord Peacock in the hall. Mossmore had noticed it.

'The present Lord Peacock,' explained Pansy, 'who was James's son by his first wife, has been most disagreeable about the portrait, claiming it, if you please, when it was distinctly given to me by James himself. I may be sometimes forgetful about trifles, but about important things no, and I distinctly remember James saying it was a portrait of himself; whereas the present Lord Peacock says it was an uncle. Of course, you know when James married me

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he was seventy, and not very much like the portrait, but there was quite a strong family likeness—a very strong one. The fact is, Mr. Mossmore, I can't live without the portrait——'

'Isn't it getting spoiled in the hall?' suggested Mossmore sympathetically. 'Dust, damp!'

'It isn't as fresh as it was,' said Pansy, 'not that you can expect it. I think the damp affects it; dust, of course, you may get anywhere. I have sometimes thought of moving it to a better place. The tragedy was,' she continued, 'that our great happiness—an unclouded happiness—only lasted eighteen months. You 've no idea how charming he was. He always said—only don't tell Eva—that he didn't like clever women; he preferred silly girls. He said that after reading all through the *Times*, simple girlish prattle was a relief. And to think it only lasted eighteen months! All those months he was more than devoted. It was a case of "All in all." You know what I mean, Mr. Mossmore?'

'No, I don't,' said Mossmore, 'but you will convince me, if anybody can. Now here is a conundrum for you, Lady Peacock,' he said, anxious to get off the subject of the departed baron. 'Why do plain girls run after men

more than pretty ones do, and why do plain men run after women more than handsome ones do? Answer that.'

Pansy shrieked with pleasure at such a mysterious and complicated puzzle. 'I shall never be able to guess,' she said—'I really couldn't.'

'Well, then, the reason is,' said Mossmore, 'that it 's a law of nature——'

'Splendid!' said Lady Peacock. 'So it is. I never thought of it before. I had an idea that laws of Nature were awfully stiff things, not amusing like that.'

'There 's no end of amusement to be got out of them if you treat them fairly. Now, for instance, look at somebody we both know—we haven't many mutual friends. Look at Miss Broadlow: she is pretty. Well, you 'll find she won't run after men, but some plain man will marry her——'

'Oh, I hope not,' said Pansy, 'I really do hope and trust she 'll get somebody really nice. Do you know—between me and you and the fender—it isn't all roses to live with Eva, and lately she 's been snappy with that girl. She ought not to be, for the poor thing 's got enough to make her miserable without that.' Then suddenly finding Mossmore's eyes riveted very

fixedly upon her, she laughed and added, 'No money, you know—no money, not a penny.'

There was only one subject in life that Lady Peacock was really interested in, and that was the relation between men and women. On other subjects she showed an illimitable density; on this subject she was a sort of blundering specialist—if the expression may be used. Indeed, she read in Mossmore's eyes more than there really was there or that he realized was there. She felt a sudden inward pang because she had almost blurted out poor Violet's secret. She had been on the edge of doing it, and had nearly fallen over, but not quite. She had just saved herself.

She was all agog to press the conversation into the 'right' direction, to make amends. She burst into praise of Violet, and did her best to draw Mossmore out. But that astute person had obtained all the information he wanted; he knew now that it *was* true that there was madness in the Broadlow family. After a few unsuccessful attempts to call Lady Peacock off the scent, he rose to go.

CHAPTER IX

MOSSMORE came out from the warm drawing-room in Pansy's villa into the keen frosty air. The thermometer must have fallen several degrees. The frost seemed thicker than it had been when he entered the house. It lay on the top of the iron palings, every particle separate from its fellow, rough and blinding white.

He passed the last house of Southdean and turned round the shoulder of the Downs into the Northdean road. He met a few stragglers coming back from their Sunday afternoon walk, and he also passed Tremayne's gamekeeper, in an unbecoming Sunday dress, slowly returning to the hamlet with his wife and children.

What was he going to say to Miss Broadlow when he did see her ?

The words would suggest themselves—words that would vividly express what he thought—namely, that he never meant, never could have

meant, that any bright young girl should bear on her own shoulders the burden of what, after all, is not present public opinion but the mere adumbration of a future policy—what in generations to come may or may not become public opinion.

Until public opinion was unanimous on the subject of disease and heredity there could be no moral obligation on the part of any individual to anticipate it.

Mossmore walked on rapidly. It was a wonderful afternoon. Overhead was a veritable 'blue vault'; and around him the air was getting keener every moment, and fresher. On his left hand rose the great rolling turf and on his right lay the great Weald. He could see lying at a short distance the park of Northdean with its leafless oaks, its hamlet chimneys faintly smoking. The air he drew in seemed full of sunny particles of scented ice. Mossmore felt as if he was drinking rather than breathing. There was a strange perfume rising up from the earth around him; a mysterious perfume, as if all the flowers and fruit and aromatic woods that grow had been cast upon some sacrificial fire and had given up their essence in honour of the ancient gods of an ancient place on that enchanted afternoon.

Mossmore looked at the sun dropping down

into a bank of haze. He might meet Miss Broadlow any moment; in fact, he fully expected to meet her coming forth to worship the ancient gods of this ancient place.

He turned into a narrow path that ran along the hillside, from which he could command the road and the whole stretch of down. If she was walking to that straw-stack he could not miss seeing her. He was lingering now, looking up and down for a familiar figure, and as he lingered the air began to get colder and keener, clinging to his face, penetrating his clothes, creeping through his bones with icy persistence.

The sun went behind the bank of haze, leaving the north-west end of it pink. Below him, to the south-west, the 'blue vault' that had hung over him all that brilliant December afternoon was no longer a vault; it was no longer a gigantic arch, painted blue, and hiding from him the infinity of space beyond. The blue had become living, it was expanding downwards, colouring the whole atmosphere. The air was already thick with its blueness; all the spaces between Mossmore and the far horizon of the world were filled full with it. It moved perceptibly, as some world-soul might move, creeping round objects that had before stood

solitary, wrapping itself round the dark trunks of the oaks, and covering the bare branches as it drifted nearer and nearer to Mossmore. Then it faded from blue into white, and at last rolled up to his feet, no longer the world's soul, but something nameless and sinister expressing itself in dense, pallid, penetrating mist with the chill of death in it. It was *this* and not Violet that had come to meet him !

Mossmore stumbled blindly downhill till he found the road again. There it was almost clear. He was within a few yards of Northdean House.

He walked up the avenue feeling subdued and not wholly at his ease. There were lights already in the windows. Johnson opened the door, and said that Mrs. Tremayne was at home.

There was no one in the drawing-room except Molly, who was lying on the hearthrug, very red and hot. She got up, and stared at him, and then came forward to shake hands.

'How is the youngest editor in England ?' asked Mossmore, retaining her hand in his.

'Oh, quite all right,' said Molly, looking up into his face, 'only I 'm not going to be editor any longer—and I 'm jolly glad.'

'No longer editor ?' asked Mossmore.

'Mother says it 's too expensive, and she thinks she 's nearly got some one else to take it.'

'So the public will be deprived of the pleasure of seeing your photograph ? ' said Mossmore.

'Don't chaff,' said Molly, wriggling out of his grasp. 'You see, mother 's got more things on now—not merely politics.'

'Yes ? ' asked Mossmore.

'Religion,' said Molly.

'Very important subject,' said Mossmore.

'Yes; but this is a new kind of stuff—a great improvement on Christianity,' said Molly. 'Here 's father. New things give him gout, so we don't say anything to him about it.'

Tremayne came into the room looking a little guilty, though he tried hard to hide it under a cordial manner.

He plunged at once into a rather long explanation about his not having been able to accept Laurence's invitation to dinner. Still Mrs. Tremayne did not put in an appearance. Tremayne rang the bell and talked about the weather, not knowing whether to praise the frost for the sake of the farmers or to damn it on account of the hounds. Johnson opened the door and went up to Tremayne.

'Mrs. Tremayne is very sorry, sir, but she is

not able to see any one this afternoon,' he said, and he retired.

For a moment there was a dead silence.

Mossmore got up from his seat.

'I meant to have called earlier, Tremayne, in hopes of a talk with you,' he said in a tone of perfect self-possession, 'but I couldn't get away.'

'Come and have a talk now; we can have tea in the smoke-room,' said Tremayne, jumping up. 'Where 's Violet, Molly?'

'Not back yet,' said Molly from a corner of the room.

Mossmore had hesitated for a moment, now his mind was made up.

'Thanks, I can't stay,' he said. 'I came to pay my respects to Mrs. Tremayne, and I 'm afraid I must go. I want, if possible, to catch the six o'clock train up to town, and Laurence is waiting for me, I think. There 's nothing I should have liked better,' he added as he moved towards the door, 'than to have had another talk about prehistoric man with you. Perhaps another time. Are you often in town?'

Tremayne was full of consternation. He felt helpless and extremely vexed. It did not console him when he came back into the hall, after seeing Mossmore out, to have Molly putting

her arms round him and whispering in a loud voice :—

'Did you notice Johnson, dear, when he brought that message? He looked as if he was made of wood and very tired.'

As to Mossmore, he walked up the avenue in the darkness, fancying at every step that he saw a tall, slight figure coming towards him. As far as he could foresee this would be the last time that he would be within the gates of Northdean House. If he missed Violet, what would he do? What could he do? Write to her? That was impossible. What he had to say couldn't be written. It had to be led up to—approached with great caution and tact. He must see her. He reached the gates. The porter's lodge was lit up and the blinds were down. Nobody would notice if he lingered a moment to see if she was coming along the road that led past the gates, past the walls of the park, and lost itself somewhere in the Weald.

The sky was absolutely clear now and studded with stars. They looked not so much mere brilliant specks of light as solid balls hanging in mid-air, not so far off. There was no moon, but Mossmore could see the frosty road very clearly for a long way. It was still very cold, but the air

was dry again. He walked very slowly, looking back at every step.

A few paces brought him to the first cottage of the hamlet. He meant when he reached it to stroll back again past the gates and walk a few hundred yards along the road to the corner of the park wall.

At the cottage he was about to turn when he heard a voice he knew. Some one was coming out. There was the bright light of a cottage fire streaming out for a moment, and then Miss Broadlow walked into the road. She saw him, and seemed startled.

'Miss Broadlow,' he said, coming up to her, 'I hope I haven't startled you?'

He felt a sudden nervousness. The sight of her, her plain tweed coat, her hat, her face under it—everything that she was herself and that she wore seemed extraordinarily pleasing. And how should he speak to this delightful and demure girl on an entirely personal and private subject? Yet he had come down from London for the sole purpose of speaking! Yes, but he had come down in cold blood, with his usual ease and self-confidence; he felt very different now he was face to face with her.

How could he thrust upon her the awful question of life—love—marriage—the whole

happiness or despair of a girl's future? Just because it *was* an awful question, because she herself probably thought of it day and night, because it was the secret burden of her youth and that he had only made it heavier for her, he *must* speak.

'I was afraid I had missed you,' he said. 'I 'm at Southdean till this evening, and I 've just been calling at your house. May I walk back with you a few steps?'

At first he thought she was going to refuse. No, she was only a little startled still, a little confused at meeting him so unexpectedly. He began to talk at once, there was no time to be lost.

'Will you give me the opportunity of apologizing for having bored you with political talk when I was at your house? I have always regretted it.'

She allowed him to walk by her side.

'You didn't bore me,' she said. 'Please don't think that——' Her voice was not very steady. He tried to see her face, but she held it away from him. He noticed that her movements were slow and without her old elasticity. Was she tired?

'If I didn't bore you I offended you by the materialistic way in which I spoke. I think I

gave you an entirely wrong impression of what my real meaning was. I was speaking as a practical politician must, impersonally. I was not speaking as a private individual. I was not speaking of you and me.'

'Please don't explain,' said Violet a little huskily. 'I quite understood what you meant; it 's all right.'

'You did not understand,' he answered firmly; 'I could see you did not by your face.'

The girl was reduced to silence, and they went on, the frosty road sounding hollow beneath their feet.

'Whatever it may be to the State, life to me and to you is more than a mathematical puzzle to be put together by mechanical dodges. It is made up of living values—sentiments—faiths—passions. Is it not?'

He waited to let his meaning sink into her mind.

They had reached the gate, and Mossmore walked in with her. He watched her as well as he could in the darkness. She was walking a little quicker now. He tried to detain her by walking slowly himself, but she moved ahead of him, and he had to quicken his pace.

'Some of the best things in life are only got by the renunciation of other things. Life is a

compromise. We bear the burdens of the past, but not of the future; the future is the burden of the future generations. Do you understand what I mean, Miss Broadlow?'

Violet did not answer; she bent her head as she walked.

'I must say something more,' he began again. 'With all its defects, I do not wish to outgrow all the prejudices of the present. I doubt if much will be gained in the future by a more perfectly organized society, and I know that much must be lost. Much will be lost of the living values such as I spoke of. For instance, in the future, when men and women refuse to take each other just as they are, with their joys and *griefs*, for better and for *worse*, then marriage will have ceased to be a sacrament. It will have become a sordid compact between two self-seeking persons who come together without courage and without faith.' He spoke with passionate conviction.

She never spoke, she was quickening her steps. They were very near to the house. The hall was full of light. At the foot of the steps she halted and breathed as if labouring under some physical strain.

'I can't argue,' she said; 'but thanks for trying to make things—things—better for me.

They can't be—it 's not what you said—what you said made no difference—indeed it didn't. Good-bye.'

She held out her hand. Girl as she was, she was dismissing him.

Mossmore dared not say more. He took her gloved hand and, bending down, kissed it.

She ran up the steps. In another moment she was gone.

He stood staring at the closed door.

'Damn!' he said slowly and emphatically, and turning round went down the dark avenue and back to Southdean.

CHAPTER X

MRS. TREMAYNE'S sitting-room was littered with new books—that is, with books that were new to her, and into which she was 'dipping.'

She had hitherto given too little time and attention to the subject of religion—religion in the whole (not an isolated Christian sect like Anglicanism). Now that the stress and strain of the election was over and she had shared the triumph of Mr. Laurence in the local papers and in Southdean generally, she had found time to search for more light in new directions.

She had always darkly felt the need of some higher and more philosophical religion if it could be got, and she had secretly felt that Anglicanism was not as much enlightened or adapted to the deeper wants of human nature as other religions were in other countries, notably in the East.

For a week she was inclined to favour the teachings of Krishna, because he was a moral personality superior to that of the founder of

Christianity, and she had almost decided upon him when she found the fact stated—truly or falsely—that he had had over twelve thousand wives.

Eva felt that altogether this could not in an Oriental be considered to show moral obliquity, still it was not exclusive enough to please her Western tastes.

Nothing she read attracted her so much as a little booklet, bound in a limp cover of pale yellow suède, called *The Seeker*.

The author of this booklet called himself Hermes, and his brief preface announced that in a vision he was shown that through his agency the East and the West should join the hands of religious brotherhoods before the century was out.

The first truth which *The Seeker* enunciated was as follows :—

'The husband is as the wife is, and the wife is as the husband, but above all things the Self is supreme.'

Now this idea, as Eva remarked to herself, was as ancient as the hills and yet had a real bearing on modern life. She could not recollect any text in the Bible that could equal this in philosophical grip.

The Seeker seemed to put her on the right track. After a week's consideration she determined on a course of action.

With the excuse of shopping she went up to town to interview Hermes, after having obtained his address through the publishers.

She was full of curiosity. She was shown into a large room hung with hieroglyphs and paintings of ancient sacrifices. This was in itself impressive, but she was still more impressed by not being allowed to see the great Hermes himself, but only one of his attendants, who was dressed in some Eastern fashion and who spoke with a slight lisp. This young man asked her to leave behind her some small personal article of dress or of use, by which the 'Master' could identify her. She gave him a pocket-handkerchief—a cheap one—such as she used for travelling, and was told that she would receive a communication later on as to whether an interview was possible. At the door she was offered an Eastern sachet containing perfume and some special prayer, for which she paid five shillings.

She went home feeling dangerously metaphysical. It was on the following Sunday afternoon that Mossmore called and was sent away. Eva was in her sitting-room, looking through

some picture papers and expecting her husband to come upstairs in search of her. He was sure to be unreasonably annoyed. At last he came.

'Well, Dick,' she said, 'has he gone?'

'Of course he 's gone,' was the brief reply. Tremayne's face was full of annoyance.

'What on earth is he down here again for? He isn't speaking.'

'When I agreed,' said Tremayne, 'not to ask him again, I did not agree that if he called he should be insulted.'

'I used to think you were rather good-looking,' said Eva, turning over the pages of a paper, 'but when you close your teeth and speak through them it is not charming.'

'He was bound to call if he happened to be in the neighbourhood,' said her husband.

'Well, he has called,' said Eva.

'And after all he has done for Southdean—you forget, Eva.'

'I don't forget, dear,' said Eva. 'Even you, Dick, must know that men don't work for nothing. He has got the Cabinet in view. Southdean was merely one of the stepping-stones.'

'What has that to do with it? Our business is to treat a gentleman like a gentleman.'

'The mere fact that a man wants to be in the

Cabinet is almost a proof that he isn't a real gentleman,' said Eva sadly. 'He will have to associate with men who aren't and to be cheeked by every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the House of Commons. We have to face that nowadays—and quite rightly too; one's greengrocer can become one's Prime Minister. All things change and decay, as philosophy says. Why, it is considered *outré* now for a peer to have a respectable mother-in-law. English society is not what it was.'

'Well, you've insulted Mossmore, who, whether he may be a flirt or not, is no end of a good chap, and he won't come again,' and Tremayne walked away.

Eva went on reading to herself, but said in a somewhat sepulchral voice, 'So much the better for Violet.'

'Why?' asked Tremayne swiftly. 'What difference can a call make?' and he approached her again.

'He is a dangerous man—I told you that before. Now go away, Dick, and smoke a pipe over it, and you will see that I am in the right.'

'You said that before, and that was why I agreed not to ask him; but your behaviour this afternoon is extravagant—quite out of all proportion to necessity and decency.'

Tremayne moved one or two chairs and then went abruptly out of the room. He was miserable—for Violet's sake. She had not been quite the same since Mossmore's visit. Poor child! What could he do for her? She was cheerful, but it was a forced cheerfulness to hide real distress. And, perhaps, Eva was not sufficiently sympathetic. Tremayne barely allowed himself to think this, but the unpleasant thought crept in of itself. He had once or twice noticed that of late Eva had spoken to Violet with something like hardness in her voice.

He did not know, however, that Eva in a small and indescribable way was constantly wounding her niece's feelings.

It is easy to forgive a fit of temper when it is generously apologized for; it is possible to forgive it even when it isn't apologized for at all. But what is desperately hard to forgive is personal allusions of an unflattering kind that are covertly meant to wound the person addressed. Eva enjoyed speaking about 'just the usual abnormal spinster' in Violet's presence. She also alluded as often as possible to the amusing fact that there were not enough 'men to go round—nowadays.' 'Only a poverty-stricken spinster' was perhaps her most usual

phrase. On one or two occasions she said that she sympathized very, very deeply with people who had impecunious relatives. With Eva 'value' meant 'market value.'

These daily pinpricks Violet bore without flinching outwardly, but she realized that as she grew older she would become more and not less an object of her aunt's covert contempt.

Tremayne did not know how much his niece had to bear; all he suspected was that Violet was in love and everything was in a muddle. If by any chance Mossmore had come down to Southdean with any intention of seeing Violet, Eva had gone and spoiled the affair.

Tremayne ardently desired his niece's marriage. It was the only thing for her, he said to himself over and over again. Violet had once spoken of a convent. It was horrible! He went into his study and shut the door with a bang. As to the Broadlow curse of insanity, God had Himself made this good, beautiful girl; surely He would have mercy on her and not punish her because her mother had been wilful, poor thing.

As soon as the smoke-room door was closed Johnson, who was laying tea in the hall, made an observation to the footman.

'There 's something hup,' he said, 'some noo fad!'

The younger man making no coherent reply, Johnson repeated his remark, 'Some noo fad!'

'Why is politics hoff?' asked the footman.

'It went hoff this hafternoon,' said the Tremaynes' family treasure, 'and it won't come back immediate. Three years ago it was all for papistry. Five courses of fish on Fridays—which is called fastin'. The 'ouse was all a-crawl with clerical gentlemen and not a decent 'air brush between 'em. Now there 's some noo fad a-bein' brought hup to the boil.'

Any further expressions of opinion were prevented by the entrance of Miss Broadlow.

'Miss Molly 's been askin' for you, miss,' said Johnson. 'She 's in the drawing-room.' As he swung open the door for her he glanced in himself. Molly was lying in her old position on the hearthrug. She was wiling away the weary moments by tracing out on an atlas imaginary journeys from the extreme north of Scotland to Southdean.

She jumped up at the sight of Violet.

'O Vi, I couldn't think why you 're so late back.'

'I was reading a little to old John,' said Violet; 'he 's not so well.'

'Oh, sorry!' said Molly. Then she went up to Violet and whispered, 'Do you know that Mr. Mossmore called and mother wouldn't see him? There 's been ever such a row—without any noise, you know. And, of course, Johnson must put on that face of his; you know what I mean.' It 's great cheek, but it does make me laugh. Father never noticed, and he was so riled when I told him; and he went straight upstairs, so I didn't go into the smoke-room with him. I came back here.'

'You shouldn't say things to people that rile them, Molly,' said her cousin.

'Yes,' said Molly slowly, 'but there 's so little going on—all the goings-on are outside that mother goes to—and I must laugh at something, and people's faces are always so queer, and it 's no fun their being queer if you mayn't tell somebody about it.'

'Well, you can tell me about it,' said Violet, drawing the girl's arm through hers.

'You don't split with laughing enough to please me, Vi,' said Molly, 'but you split more than father does, and much more than mother does. Have you noticed that Pansy only splits at what she says herself? I don't think she half hears what other people say, though she 's not deaf.'

'Come and help me take off my things,' said Violet, moving towards the door.

Molly put one arm round her cousin and hung on to her.

'It would be horrid with you not here, especially when father 's riled.'

Violet made no reply, and they went out of the room together.

CHAPTER XI

NEXT to the aggravation of having quite unnecessary responsibilities thrust upon you without a 'by your leave,' or any proper recognition of the fact that you are bearing them with heroic patience, is the aggravation of having these responsibilities suddenly removed without a 'by your leave,' or even a hint of the plots and machinations that have been carried on behind your back, and which have finally led up to your release from martyrdom.

The astounding news that Violet, who seemed a fixture for ever at Northdean House, had actually taken a step in life on her own initiative, was burst upon Mrs. Tremayne without any warning. The mere fact that Violet was going away was so surprising that Mrs. Tremayne had not at first room in her mind for being still more surprised that Violet was going away to—of all places—St. Ursula's, an Anglican convent of nursing sisters.

How long Violet had intended taking this

step Eva could not guess, but she discovered that Dick had known about it for two months at least. They had talked it over together, the dear, dear pair of simpletons; and Dick had actually been once with Violet to see the Mother Superior—one day when Eva was in town.

To say the least of it, it was a little mean of them not to have consulted her. A question like religion ought to have been submitted to her; she knew all about it.

Dick's argument that Violet did not want to talk to anyone about this plan of hers, and had only consulted him because he was her guardian, was a silly argument. Violet's real motive, both hers and Dick's, really was, that they were afraid of intellectual criticism. They knew no philosophy, and were afraid of getting drawn into some discussion in which they would be worsted.

This thought quieted Mrs. Tremayne's indignation a little. Yes, Violet would scarcely have dared to expose herself to any searching criticism; and, after all, a penniless orphan who has no prospects (who did not even succeed in catching that impressionable Mr. Mossmore), and who takes no interest in the vital questions of the day, may as well go into a convent as

anywhere else. Nursing sick people would at least keep her from always thinking about herself. Nothing is so bad for the health as well as for the character as thinking about oneself. Fortunately Eva felt no temptation to think about herself; she was always thinking—thinking of Humanity—and that was why she was never ill and scarcely ever tired. She had no time to think about ailments, and so ailments did not come, neither did the sense of fatigue.

As to the religious dogma that would be imposed upon Violet at St. Ursula's, Eva doubted if Violet was fit for the free life of scientific inquiry; dogma would probably be what she needed. Dogma can, after all, only be thrown off by those who have risen to a comparatively high mental plane—a plane where you can make your stand against mere creeds, and say simply, 'I believe in a supreme World Spirit whom I call God, transcendent and yet imminent in all organic nature. I believe in the equality and fraternity and liberty of all human beings, and I believe that I am immortal, and that I am supremely necessary to God and the universe.'

Eva did not add in words, but she thought, 'I believe that I know what I am talking about,'

quite unaware that this is a more stupendous dogma than any that has been invented by the wiles of priestcraft.

It was not merely the shock of the news about Violet that disturbed Eva's mind, but the questions, the condolences that were offered her by the neighbourhood, Pansy's remarks, and above all Molly's tearful protests and Dick's gloomy face when, from time to time, he suddenly remembered that Violet was going.

There was also the practical question to be faced: what was to be done with Molly when Violet was gone? Dick proposed sending her to school. But this would be an extra expense. A governess at sixteen pounds a year would be far cheaper and more useful all round.

Mrs. Thompson had always been a bit disagreeable at having to do what was properly Amelia's work for the child.

What the old housekeeper did with all her spare time Eva could not conceive, but she made it quite plain that she toiled upstairs and saw Molly into her bed and folded up her clothes out of affection for the child, and not because it was a housekeeper's business. Now a governess would do anything she was asked to do, and she could also type! That was the solution of the problem.

But there was another matter concerning Violet's future that suddenly inflamed Mrs. Tremayne's thoughts. Violet could not wear her pearl necklace in a convent. It would be useless to her for the rest of her life. Supposing, however, that she didn't like the convent life after having been a postulant or perhaps even a novice, and wanted to come out, and demanded her pearl necklace?

It was all the more necessary to make sure of it being in the hands of a really sensible person, who would not insist on going in and out of convents. The necklace was not very valuable. It had been given to Lady Broadlow as a wedding present by a Tremayne aunt, and was worth something between eight and nine hundred pounds. The proper thing—the only decent thing for Violet to do, considering all that had been done for her—was to give the necklace to Molly on her thirteenth birthday. It would be a lovely, lovely birthday and good-bye present for the child. Molly couldn't wear it for four or five years; but as it was really a Tremayne necklace, she, Eva, could wear it—till Molly was eighteen—then she would give it up. She would give it up gladly to the dear child. How strange and how profoundly metaphysical! One's child is oneself and yet not oneself!

A mother makes sacrifices every instant by a sort of mysterious, sacred instinct.

Had Violet already said anything to her Uncle Dick about giving the necklace to Molly?

Once Mrs. Tremayne was almost on the point of asking him, but she refrained. Somehow, you couldn't discuss anything quietly and rationally with Dick. He had his limitations—there were things he could not understand. And he also had a man's habit of going away into another room if he disliked the talk.

She must sound Violet at once.

'I suppose,' she began, 'that you will wear a crucifix at St. Ursula's, Violet?'

Violet looked at her aunt with a sudden wonder at this show of personal interest. 'Yes, Aunt Eva,' she said.

'The only jewellery allowed?'

'No jewellery is allowed; it will be a plain bronze crucifix,' said Violet.

Eva looked narrowly at her. 'No jewellery at all—not even a ring? I can understand their not allowing necklaces and that sort of thing.'

'No jewellery of any kind,' said Violet.

How engrossed Violet was with this religious fad. She was too much shut up with her own

little affairs to think of Molly. It might be necessary to be explicit.

On the following day Eva was just sending Violet out with some commissions to Southdean when she said :—

'Talking of the watchmakers, by the by, what shall you do with that little Tremayne necklace you wear when you go to St. Ursula's ?'

'The Tremayne necklace ?' repeated the girl. Then she blushed deeply. 'My pearl necklace ?'

'One of the few bits of Tremayne jewellery,' said her aunt.

Violet hesitated for a moment, then said with some confusion :—

'It did not belong to great-Aunt Joyce, Aunt Eva ; she bought it for mother, and Uncle Dick is going to sell it for me. I have to pay the convent fifty pounds a year.' The girl's voice was very low.

Eva was profoundly disgusted, but she controlled herself.

'How funny these religious people are, getting money out of you as well as your services ; they really are funny !'

'The institution has to be kept up. Everybody has to help,' said Violet, turning quite pale again.

'The necklace won't produce fifty pounds a

year,' said her aunt, putting her arms behind her back. 'You can think yourself fortunate if you get eight hundred for it! Eight hundred at four per cent!'

'I have three hundred pounds of my own,' said Violet rather faintly, 'and Uncle Dick has very generously offered to make up the sum that is needed.' She now understood what had been going on in her aunt's mind. It was intensely painful to think of.

'I do hope, Violet, that your intention of becoming a nun is not merely a foolish craze for something new. You have talked it over with your uncle, so it appears, but you must remember that he is very sentimental. Horses he does understand, but he knows nothing about nuns.'

'He doesn't want me to become a nun,' said Violet. 'It isn't his doing, Aunt Eva.'

'Nor mine either,' said Eva sharply. 'I consider the whole thing a foolish imitation of Roman superstition. A girl gets discontented because she can't get a husband, and she imagines that she shifts the sense of social failure off her back by taking a vow not to have a husband. I can't see anything religious in it. If it 's religion you want, you can be religious at home. The deep, deep commune with the

Almighty can be carried on wherever you are—there 's absolutely nothing to prevent it; in fact, I think it a great sign of weakness not to be able to contemplate the Absolute except on a particular stool or at a particular moment. That is not the spirit in which ancient races sought after the Eternal.'

Violet did not answer. She turned away slowly enough to show due respect to her aunt, and went out of the hall. She walked down the steps and into the avenue. Her aunt's words had seemed like tangible things—sharpened metal striking her. She was stinging all over with the wounds made by them, and trying all the time to be calm, because, for good and for evil, she was in God's hands.

These last few months she had been fighting against a growing agitation of mind. Ever since those few days in November, days unfortunately never to be forgotten, she had observed with confusion and a certain anxiety that her thoughts reiterated themselves even against her will. Beat them back as she would with prayer, they came again and again.

Once—it was after she had been up to St. Ursula's to see the Mother Superior—she had wakened in the night with a sudden sense of horror, feeling that her thoughts were

no longer her own, but had become external to herself, moving about the room in some indistinguishable but malignant form. She wanted to scream, but inbred fear of giving trouble to other people and her extreme reserve kept her silent, lying in her bed bathed in a cold sweat.

Was this the beginning of some devastating brain disease? Was she losing her mental control? Were the germs of that fatal inheritance of her father springing into life in her? She strung herself up, stiffened herself like steel to fight the thought. Once in the serene atmosphere of St. Ursula's she would be safe; she would be surrounded by a sacred peace; she would be free from agitation. She could hide under the shadow of the Cross; the convent would be her refuge, not only from the world but from herself.

As Violet walked under the leafless trees of the avenue she tried to subdue the beating pulses in her forehead, saying to herself over and over again that she had already gone through the worst. An interview of some sort with her Aunt Eva about the convent had been inevitable —it was over. The few days that still lay before her would be sad, perhaps, but they would contain no fresh shock, nothing that would be a

strain on her power of self-control. She had put the past behind her. She knew now that Mossmore had never thought seriously of her; and so, thank God, she had been spared the agony of renouncing him. If she had had *that* pain, it might have proved too much for her—too much. As it was, peace lay before her; all she needed was peace.

As to Eva Tremayne, when Violet had closed the door of the hall behind her, she uttered several exclamations of annoyance.

Violet was such a pious goose, such a self-centred little fraud. It was so like Dick not to have thought of poor Molly when the question of selling the necklace came up, and to be giving Violet two or three hundred pounds in addition when they were so hard up. So the convent was to be paid, if you please, and to have Violet's services, when all these years Violet had been given bed and board at Northdean—for nothing. Kept—if you please! Not a penny of money had been asked from her! How preposterously selfish and stupid other people were.

It seemed like an interposition of Providence, distracting Eva's mind from this sordid affair, when the second post brought her a letter from the secretary of Hermes—doubtless the young

man with the lisp. The letter intimated that the 'Master' was about to deliver a series of lectures for beginners on the 'New Psychology of the Human Soul.' He invited Mrs. Tremayne to attend the first lectures.

This was a delightful relief from the grossly mundane atmosphere which pervaded Northdean and Southdean.

Eva rushed up to town full of pleasant excitement. She had as yet said nothing to Dick about the New World Religion. He was going about from day to day in profound ignorance of the existence of Hermes. Molly had been told a little, because she was now old enough to think about religion. Violet, of course, had seen all the literature that came into the house, and had read it, as usual, without comment.

Eva kept the secret of her visits to the 'Master's' house.

She arrived a little late. The young man with the lisp was at the inner door, and putting his finger on his lips he took her by the hand and led her into the room with the hieroglyphics. It was almost dark. A large audience was seated with their eyes fixed on a dais, on which a light was thrown from below. On the dais sat Hermes in a green robe. His face was veiled. No doubt his esoteric lectures to the more

advanced were delivered by him with his face uncovered. Eva hoped so.

Eva was a little agitated by the strangeness of the situation, and even when she was led to a vacant chair it took her a minute or two to become fully aware that she was listening to a slow and rather impressive voice that had the least suspicion of a colonial twang in it.

When she had become used to the darkness she discovered that the heavy curtains on each side of the dais were blue. She looked furtively round to see what sort of people were eager for a World Religion. As far as she could judge in the obscurity they were chiefly women and well dressed. That was reassuring. It also suggested a brilliant idea to Eva.

What if she could get Hermes down to an At Home at Northdean House? The ball-room would do splendidly for the lecture. What a sensation it would create. It would rouse the Southdean people, shake them up a bit, and make them think. It would do them worlds of good. Would Hermes want a big fee? If he did, couldn't she make the people she invited pay half a crown each?

Would it be possible to offer Hermes no fee, but a silver collection? That might be a good alternative.

As far as she could judge the lecture, without following it carefully, it was deeply interesting. It was all about the fine invisible chemical properties of the soul. How they affected the features of the face, the complexion, the clothes, and even the jewellery worn.

The mysterious lecturer's attitude towards the soul was not merely philosophical, but it was intensely scientific!

The address lasted a little over half an hour—all too short—but doubtless enough for beginners.

Before Hermes dismissed his audience he requested them to fold their arms across their breasts in the attitude in which Gautama Buddha is represented to the faithful, and which has in all ages been symbolical of respect and attention.

The audience obeyed him, and there was a jingling of bracelets and adjustments of furs. When it had ceased he asked them to look at him fixedly and to think of him—though veiled from their sight—in a very concentrated manner. Then he addressed a prayer to the World Spirit. Eva was all attention now; she could see incense rising from behind Hermes, while in the profound stillness he uttered some half-dozen sentences in the unknown language. Then the youth with the lisp pulled a cord with

all his might, and the massive blue curtains came together and shut out the dais and Hermes, and only the heavy scent of incense remained.

The lights were put up and the audience streamed out of the room.

At the door a female child in an Oriental dress held a plate and said monotonously, 'For the maintenance of the Master.'

There was gold in it as well as silver. Eva put in a two-shilling piece as an economical way of giving half a crown, also because she remembered that she had given five shillings for that sachet, which was rather dear!

Suddenly her eyes were caught by something in the crowd in front of her that was pouring through the door. Surely it was a familiar Southdean 'back.' Whose back? She pushed quickly through the door, and stepping on the pavement looked sharply round her. She could see no one she knew. The street was full of private cars and taxis waiting for the pupils of the veiled Prophet. Whose familiar back was it? Was it Mrs. Austin Dick's?

Eva believed it was! It would be just like Mrs. Dick to hunt out Hermes or anything else new. Since she had been left that money two months ago she had put on airs of great consequence, the most absurd being her talk

of renting a flat in the most expensive quarter of London, in order to be able to run up now and then and escape from the paralysing effect of provincial life.

If that familiar back was Mrs. Dick's—it might—it probably would mean a race between her and Eva as to who should secure the Prophet first. But it would be a bit awkward to pounce upon Hermes immediately. She must first find out whether the ' back ' was really Mrs. Dick's.

CHAPTER XII

IT would be quite impossible just now to break the news to Dick that there was a World Religion—his mind seemed to be occupied with the one thought, that Violet was going away about the middle of February. She could not very well tell Violet about getting Hermes down unless she also told Dick. As to Pansy, if she knew that Hermes was going to be invited down to Northdean the whole of Southdean, including Mrs. Dick, would know about it within twenty-four hours; and meanwhile Molly's birthday-party — promised long ago—had to be arranged. Molly had been promised a fancy-dress dance for her thirteenth birthday on February the 5th. Eva must get that over before she had Hermes. Hermes must be secured between that date and Ash Wednesday. If Mrs. Dick intended getting the Prophet down to Southdean she probably would have sent out At Home cards already. She always gave very long notices, as if her

entertainments were of considerable importance. Eva called on Mrs. Dick, but did not find her at home, and she could scarcely call again without giving Mrs. Dick too much encouragement. Molly's dance was on Thursday the 5th. Suppose Eva were to secure the Prophet for the 9th?

Eva laughed to herself at the thought of sending out invitations to the rector of Southdean and his family.

The question was how to get the Founder of the New Religion as cheaply as possible. It was a matter that required thought.

Meanwhile, it was a distinct relief to find positively that Mrs. Dick was not her rival, for an At Home card arrived from that enterprising lady asking the Tremaynes and Violet to an At Home on the afternoon of Friday, February the 6th, with no mention of any address or lecture, or any remark calculated to rouse the curiosity of Southdean.

But Eva's peace of mind was not destined to last for many hours. A disaster awaited her. Pansy came up to Northdean in a great hurry, bursting with news.

The news had been obtained under the seal of secrecy. Pansy was pledged not to divulge the secret to any human being. Eva was,

strictly speaking, not a human being—something superior in her own eyes—so Pansy felt justified in going straight to her with the interesting tidings that Mrs. Austin Dick's At Home, seemingly so innocent, was really to be a surprise to the whole of Southdean.

'What sort of surprise?' asked Eva coldly.

'Everybody seems to be getting religious,' answered Pansy. 'There 's Violet going to be a nun, and——'

'What sort of surprise?' demanded Eva sternly.

'The At Home is to be a surprise,' said Pansy.

'So I gather from you, but what sort of surprise? Is Mrs. Dick going to have one of her teeth drawn publicly in her drawing-room, or is she going to be baptized, or what?'

'She 's got a sorcerer coming down from town,' said Pansy, 'a sort of prophet person. There!'

'To amuse the children?' asked Eva. So, while she had been hesitating and considering, Mrs. Dick had captured the situation!

'Oh, dear no! She wouldn't tell me the name,' said Pansy, 'but I think it 's somebody beginning to be well known in town—though not down here. Mrs. Dick thinks Southdean wants waking up to religion. After having had

practically no religion herself all these years—I call it another piece of her usual cheek. But of course I couldn't tell her that.'

Eva got up from her chair and went to the window. There was no choice open to her. She must from this moment look upon the Prophet as an interesting specimen among other specimens of religious revivalism, and nothing more. Now that Mrs. Dick had got him, he must be nothing more remarkable than a passing philosophical phenomenon—out of fashion in a few months.

'Well,' said Pansy, 'I thought you 'd be interested, but I suppose Violet's going away is taking up everybody's thoughts in this house. Eva, I do wish the dear girl wasn't going to make a martyr of herself; it *is* so unnecessary.'

Eva made no reply. She was still looking out of the window thinking. What if she could show Mrs. Dick that the Prophet was only looked upon as an amusing item in an evening's programme in Northdean House. That would rather take the wind out of Mrs. Dick's sails.

'Have all the kids accepted Molly's dance?' asked Pansy, after a pause.

'Yes,' said Eva, turning round and looking at her friend. 'And it is just possible that I shall make the dance a bigger affair than I

intended at first. I had thought of having an At Home, but I 'm not at all sure I shan't knock everybody off on the 5th. You know how I have to consider expense.'

'Do you mean to make it a mixed dance—old and young?' demanded Pansy.

'Yes,' said Eva, coming away from the window and going to her writing-table.

'You only give us all a week to get fancy dresses?' cried Pansy. 'It 's only a week and one day to the 5th. Do you realize that, Eva?'

'A week 's long enough to get up the sort of rig that Southdean calls fancy dress,' said Eva in her most autocratic voice.

Pansy was lost in thought for a moment.

'I can wear my black chiffon, add spangles, and wear a crescent moon in my hair, and there I am—Night, if you please; but I must get in a touch of blue, my blue, somewhere. Blue, blue, blue, to throw up my eyes.'

'Throw up your eyes!' said Eva. 'You do use such common phrases about things. Your eyes won't matter. I think I shall make it a *bal-masqué*. I 'm only telling you what I think I may do. I haven't fully decided.'

'Well, my dear girl, there isn't much time to wait and think—only a week and a day,' said her friend. 'Ted can wear his old uniform.

Why on earth *masqué*? or if *masqué*, then let 's do without fancy dress.'

'It is quite easy to make up some sort of a fancy dress,' said Eva, 'if only you have a scrap of intelligence. It needs thinking over. Fancy dress and *masqué*.' She spoke slowly and thoughtfully.

'Let me know as soon as you can,' said Pansy as she got up to go. 'I must run away; I 've got to be home by four, and it 's past that already.'

'Oh dear, oh dear,' she added, as she buttoned up her coat, 'can't you knock that nunnery idea out of Violet's head? It really is too absurd. Make her wait till she 's thirty. She 's not had a chance yet.'

'Chance of what?' asked Eva, looking at her friend.

'Of marrying, of course,' said Pansy. 'What else could I mean?'

'Well, that 's not our fault,' said Eva.

'Make her wait and see how she feels after she 's had an offer from some eligible man. You feel quite different when you 've been made love to by the right sort of man. It takes away the blues as nothing else does.'

'My dear Pansy, you think too much about men,' said Eva; 'every woman can't marry,

not to speak of marrying twice, and Violet does not seem likely to have an offer.'

'Humph!' said Pansy. 'These things need a little manœuvring—a little manœuvring makes things march properly. Well, I'm off, Eva. I think my black chiffon will do. I've worn it a good deal, and I don't need it now I've got that black marquisette. When you dress as a "character" your dress needn't be "up-to-date." A touch of blue is what I want, because my eyes will show if I take my *masque* off. Don't come down with me if you want to think that matter over, and do let me know as soon as possible.'

'Very well,' said Eva, 'I'll send you a post card with "Yes" or "No" on it the moment I've decided.'

Pansy made her way alone down the staircase into the lobby, and down the circular steps on to the gravel. There was Violet carrying in a pot of lilies of the valley from the greenhouse.

'You're the very person I want,' said Pansy, pouncing upon the girl and taking her free arm. 'I can't get you out of my head, Violet, you and your nunnery. You've no idea how surprised everybody is.'

'I can't help that, can I?' said Violet with a smile.

'Yes, you can, by not surprising them,' said Pansy. 'You really are too young, far too young.'

'Do you call twenty-four very young?' said Violet.

'You 're a child,' said Pansy. 'Now, Molly 'll go and get scarlet fever as soon as you 're gone —or something else very bad—and you 'll not be there to look after her; and she 'll die perhaps, and then you 'll never forgive yourself. Besides, your Uncle Dick 's going about looking only half the size he was, and he never was a big man.'

Violet winced a little.

'I 'm awfully sorry to be leaving,' she said. 'You know that.'

Pansy squeezed her arm.

'Then don't leave *him*.'

Violet tried to smile and said nothing.

'Don't smile,' said Pansy. 'You 're doing wrong, and you know you are. As long as there are eligible men about, it 's folly to shut yourself up—it 's folly.'

'Then it 's folly I 'm going to commit,' said Violet; 'but, dear Lady Peacock, don't imagine I am wanting to hurt anybody; I 'm not. I hate hurting Uncle Dick.'

'Of course,' said Pansy, 'and I 've no doubt you have most high and beautiful thoughts

which you call religion—and perhaps it is—only I 'm not at all holy, and I just call it the blues, my dear, and I feel frightfully sorry you 're going. Now,' she added, pressing the girl's arm, 'why didn't you give a little encouragement to that charming man—I won't say his name, but it begins with Aubrey, and the rest is partly vegetable.'

Violet's features did not move, but the life went out of them.

'You are very, very naughty,' said Pansy, releasing her arm. 'If I were your mother, I should make you a bit selfish and sensible—there,' and with a loud sigh of exasperation she turned away and went off up the avenue. A splendid idea, however, had darted into her brain.

'I 've a good mind to write to him,' she said to herself. Indeed, why shouldn't she? It couldn't make things worse than they were, and it might make them better. Pansy meant to take a bold step. She skipped up the avenue, full of excitement and determination.

Violet, released, stood holding the pot of lilies in her hands. She bent her head down and smelt them—they were so unconscious and beautiful. The wintry sunshine steeped them in pale gold.

Tremayne had come up from the stables and saw her. What should he do when that quiet kindly presence had gone from the house? It would be a long time before Molly was old enough to take her place.

And there was no necessity for her going. That horrible inheritance of the Broadlows was not a sufficient reason for Violet becoming a nun! But Tremayne could not say this to her, for, closely intimate as they were, she never once had spoken of the Broadlows to him. She had given as her reasons for going away the desire for a religious life and work. He knew that there were other reasons—not only the fear of her inheritance, but the desire to be independent of Eva; also he remembered the scene after Mossmore's departure. Poor Violet!

On his side he could not use the best arguments against her going. He could speak of Molly's disappointment, but he could not say that Violet's influence was necessary to the child's proper training—to say so would have been treachery to Eva. He could not say that *he* needed his niece when his wife and child were in the house.

He clung to vague impressions, that something would happen to prevent her going—something

at present unforeseen. It was so difficult to imagine her gone!

He took the pot of lilies out of her hands in an almost gallant fashion, and took her arm under his arm. If he had done this to Eva she would have asked him if anything was the matter.

'Still feeling the same?' he questioned.

'Just the same,' she replied in a regretful whisper.

That evening just before dinner Eva got a wire from Hermes in answer to one she had sent that afternoon. She was in her bedroom when the message was brought to her. She tore open the envelope and read the telegram in a little flutter of excitement. It was all right! Indeed, it was better than her expectation. The Prophet was not annoyed at having his mysterious seclusion so prematurely invaded by her. He was obliged to be in Southdean on February the 6th, when he had a pressing engagement; and the great man consented to appear at Mrs. Tremayne's At Home on the evening of February the 5th (without lecture) for the very much reduced fee of ten guineas in advance.

Eva stood with the paper in her hand, and smiled at her figure reflected in the mirror opposite. There was no need to tell her

husband about Hermes just yet. She would wait for a good opportunity. She could imagine herself on the evening of February the 5th dressed *à la Grecque*—looking very intellectual, chatting in a patronizing way with the Prophet, and taking the bloom off him at a comparatively slight expense compared with what Mrs. Austin Dick would probably have to pay, although *she* would only get him second-hand on the afternoon of February the 6th!

Eva could imagine herself going up to Mrs. Dick and saying, 'I 'm not going to bore you, and I 'm not going to bore any of my *bridge friends*, by introducing them to the author of *The Seeker*. I 'm afraid I 'm very curious. I like to see and speak to any interesting person who comes to the front. One doesn't, of course, expect to get *much* from them—but something. It doesn't do to despise any passing event in the mental world, however small.'

As soon as dinner was over, and Eva had gone into the drawing-room with her niece, she told her of her plan of turning Molly's dance into a large mixed ball.

'Expense is such a consideration,' she said. 'I had meant to have an At Home, but I shall knock off Southdean all in a lump on Thursday week, and it will mean less trouble too. I want

you to help me write out the cards at once, and we 'll have them posted the last thing, and everybody will get them by the first post to-morrow.'

'Shall I bring down your writing things here, or shall we go up to your room?' asked Violet.

'We 'll go to my room,' said Eva. 'It struck me that you would like a more grown-up dance before you go, Violet. I haven't given one for ages. You might come as a nun; it would be an easy rig-up—only cost a few shillings.'

Violet followed her aunt upstairs without speaking.

'You might come as a nun,' repeated Eva in a contented voice. She must not forget to send a post card to Pansy—it would save a penny stamp and an At Home card. It was so like Pansy to call a religious teacher a 'sorcerer,' merely because she had never heard of him before—and he wasn't a curate!

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CHAPTER XIII

THE constructive artist may be ungenerously defined as an individual who is able to give a great deal of pleasure to the many who don't know him personally, and a great deal of pain to the few who do.

Mossmore was no constructive artist; he had the artistic temperament to a limited degree. Had he possessed more of it, had he been morally intemperate or consumed by vanity, he might have been able to do a more permanent thing than talk; he might have painted a great picture or written a great book, and have been a source of anxiety to his intimate friends.

As it was, he was personally liked even by those who looked upon him as a demagogue.

As to his political allies, they relied upon him as an able exponent of the spirit of the age. That exactly described him. He could, whenever he chose, express with grace the undigested views and the sentiments of the moment, and he could add a touch of electrical passion that gave

the impression—at least to the outside world—that he was actually creating and not merely reflecting what his party called their progressive policy. He was not really creating anything. His business was to be a partisan, but he was in himself never at any time more than a spectator of political parties, regarding them with a keen interest and a considerable amount of humour.

But, as already remarked, Mossmore had seriously thrown in his lot with the Liberals, and he had grown to like the party and take a pride in it. 'A poor thing, sir, but mine own.' Moreover, his ambitions, all the personal interests of his life, and the rollicking enjoyment of the human struggle were identified with it.

One quality Mossmore possessed to perfection: he had a genius for conciliation. He could be relied upon to utter no personalities; but at the same time he could, when necessary for his purpose, meet the enemy with a genial satire that was more effective than any show of temper. Among the crowd of public-spirited place-hunters he stood supreme.

While Mrs. Tremayne was preparing herself for an interesting moment when she should, so to speak, jump upon the prostrate body of

Mrs. Austin Dick, Mossmore was placing his foot upon the first rung of the Cabinet Ladder. The shuffling of the Cabinet cards on the retirement of one member had resulted in Mossmore being offered the Local Government Board. Strangely enough on the very day, February the 5th, that Mrs. Tremayne was to exchange great thoughts with Hermes and possibly suggest fresh ones to him on the subject of the New World Religion, Mossmore's appointment was to be made public.

The day before, the fourth of February, the last day in which he should speak in the House as a private member, he had to make one of those meaningless, well-rounded speeches which help to keep temporarily together a heterogeneous coalition. His speech was to be directed to those numerous members of the House of Commons who prefer the immediate results of inspirational thought to those painfully acquired by the repulsive process of experience and knowledge.

Mossmore sat down to breakfast on the morning of February the 4th with some very handsome phrases running through his mind that he calculated would allay the fears of the sentimentalists. His high spirits were suddenly sobered, as he ran through the letters and packets on his table, by the sight of a letter

from Southdean, addressed in a woman's handwriting, very large and unknown to him. Not Mrs. Tremayne, whose hand he knew, and therefore——

He took it from the pile and tore it open, conscious of a strange stirring at the heart that he could not suppress. Such stirring was quite unnecessary, for the address at the top of the letter was not Northdean House, but 'Ye olde Garthe, Southdean.'

Mossmore pushed the contents—bulky enough—back into their envelope and began his breakfast.

He had not eaten much when he stretched out his hand and took up the letter again. After all, it might contain a word or two about *her*.

It consisted of five single quarto sheets each containing about two or three dozen immense words. The last sheet was crossed diagonally by Pansy's signature.

The letter turned out to be of such deep interest to Mossmore that after he had read it through he began reading the last sheets over again. The letter opened with the plausible pretence of being all about a rumour from the political world. Pansy had written her letter in the strictest privacy. She had told no one

that she was writing. She had no one, therefore, to tell her what were the official titles of Cabinet ministers to whom she wished to refer. It did not matter! To omit any definite mention of names rather added to the rumour-like nature of the rumour.

Well, the rumour was, that a *post* that belonged to the man who was now retiring from his *post* was to be given to another man, who gave up his *post* in order to take the other *post*. This *post* would therefore be vacant, and everybody said the Prime Minister must give this *post* to Mr. Mossmore, who deserved a *post*, if anybody did, and indeed the best *post*, a far better *post* than the other man was going to get instead of his own *post* which Mr. Mossmore was going to have. This was a scandalous shame, but still she was right glad to think it might be true that Mr. Mossmore was going to have some *post* at once, because if the present Government were turned out (worse luck if it was!) there mightn't be a chance of a *post* for ages, and that would be indeed hard lines.

Having disposed of the *post* question Pansy turned to the real object of the letter. She went on to say, 'You will be surprised to hear that Miss Broadlow is going into an Anglican convent—horrid places, I think, and a real

tragedy! I hope it 's not some disappointment at the bottom of it all, don't you?' Here the letter ended.

Mossmore folded up all five sheets, replaced them in the envelope, threw it on the table, and went on conscientiously with his breakfast.

He had always thought of Violet Broadlow as for ever at Northdean House. Always there in that quiet corner, while he wrestled with the forces of the great world outside. For some weeks he had pictured her as permanently accessible. Even if Mrs. Tremayne continued to act the dragon, he could go down into Sussex and search for that tall, agile girl somewhere between the last cottage of Northdean and that homely sheltering stack of straw on the ridge of the Downs.

The question with him had merely been: Do I want to find her? Any answer to this question he had put off from day to day. There was no hurry about it. She was there—waiting! Yes, waiting, in spite of her admirable reserve and her conscientious scruples.

Now the question was a different one. It was: Will she be there? It was of no use now to go on picturing her climbing those Downs towards the setting sun. How intolerably dreary those rolling hills and valleys would

look if he went down to see them after she had gone away! Gone away!

Mossmore got up from the breakfast-table and walked about the room filled with a growing excitement. What was he going to do? Nothing that day! He was busy preparing an important case that came on at the end of the week; he had two business committees to attend, and there was his speech. The following morning he had to see the Prime Minister, but after that he could get away from town for a few hours, if it was absolutely necessary! He could, if he thought it necessary, go down to Southdean by the two o'clock train and return the same evening.

And when he got down to Southdean, what was he going to do? He was going to try and get rid of that dull feeling of nausea that gripped him when he thought of those bare monotonous slopes without her. He would see her, at any rate. Anything further than that was in the hands of the Fates. He would follow whither he was led. Yes, but this was the decision of a fool, not of a man of sense, such as he had always been. Yes, but those dreary, desolate Downs!

So, fool or not, he sat down and wrote her a letter, asking her bluntly to let him know

to-morrow at the Queen's Hotel, Southdean, whether he could come and see her.

Suppose she did not want to see him ?

He felt as if he had within him the power of overcoming all obstacles. He had overcome all obstacles in his life hitherto. He would overcome them in the future.

What about the inheritance of the Broadlows ? He would be mixed up in that now. Why think about the Broadlows ? That was taking for granted that he was going to propose to her.

And supposing he did propose, were not the necessities of human life greater than any theories on the subject of heredity ? There are always two sides to every case. There is the prosecution and there is the defence.

As a matter of fact he knew that he could arm himself with expert permission for her to marry. In the Law Courts expert evidence can always be obtained both for and against any medical theory. He could, if he liked, go to a mental doctor whose wife had some nervous heredity, and get from him a 'scientific' opinion that the inheritance of disease was a very doubtful hypothesis. He could go and get from him or from any pathologist the encouraging news, on the best authority, that what used

to be called twelve months ago mental disease is now probably traceable to a disorder of the blood that can be counteracted.

An hour ago Mossmore might have been disposed to make use of such arguments—even to Violet Broadlow. He certainly would have used them on the platform, or as counsel if they had strengthened his case; but since he had read that letter he had ceased to be merely a lawyer or a politician. He was a man, and his mind revolted against putting before this upright girl any argument that did not convince himself. Is it good for the race that abnormal constitutions should be patched up to hand down their defective physique to future generations? His own answer—as a man—was 'No.' He did not mean to argue with Violet. What then? Ah! that was a question that made his pulses beat and his heart stir strangely.

This long day of the fourth of February seemed interminable. He was thankful when at last it had drawn to a close, and he made his way to Westminster.

CHAPTER XIV

THE subject was India. Mossmore's own views did not differ from those of the experienced Indian civilian. He could not even for the sake of the extreme left wing of his party share their suburban naïveté, and regard the Indian as a highly developed Anglo-Saxon of a slightly darker tint than is usual, trodden under the heel of a military despotism. He was sufficiently the victim of historical truth to realize that although the varied races of India had the start of us by several centuries, they never evolved any form of government that could protect their people from oppression and fraud, nor did they evolve any international policy but that of intermittent and irresponsible warfare.

Our handful of expert civilians, supported by their thousand and one clerks and our battalions of soldiery, have imposed on India a veneer of peace and prosperity. The physically strong are prevented from exterminating the physically

weak, and the population increases by leaps and bounds. How far it is an advantage to the whole world that the population should increase by leaps is another matter. But the result of our policy is veneer. The Oriental submits, but does not approve. It is not his idea of life. He does not really believe in an absolutely impartial and incorruptible administration of justice. God does not work like that. Mossmore's view was that the Oriental mind is not built on precisely the same lines as that of the Teuton. It may be better, it may be worse; it is different—not even to be remodelled by education at Oxford and Cambridge. An Oriental cannot imitate the indecent antics of an English cad, only a negro is able to sink to that depth; nor can the Oriental apparently develop into an English gentleman of the strong, irreproachable type.

But this is not the sort of thing that a Liberal politician dares to say to the political Evangelicals. They are convinced, from a practical acquaintance of the retail trade of Stockton-on-Tees or of Merthyr Tydfil, that if it is not a *biological* truth that all men on this earth are born with similar moral possibilities (if only the right gospel is preached to them) it is a *spiritual* truth. Mossmore was aware that it would even

be impolitic to his present purpose to suggest that if Great Britain evacuated India, India would be at the mercy of some more militant power than ourselves, because that section of the House of Commons whom he was really addressing would remain incredulous and cynical.

Mossmore's speech was formed entirely for 'lobby' purposes. It had the same practical intentions behind it (and in the main they are benevolent) that lie behind the glowing advertisements that appeal to the public imagination. It is easy to bring down excursionists by thousands to watch the rain and taste the whipped 'white of egg' and glucose flavoured with elm leaves in Cornwall and Devon, by calling those counties the land of sunshine—of cream and honey!

Mossmore dwelt with passionate unction upon the splendid future of India. If there was a momentary stiffening of our policy, it was merely one of those deplorable though necessary pauses in the race, one taken in order to spring again with renewed energy towards the ultimate freedom of that great continent.

Mossmore described the Indian races as being of flesh and blood like ourselves—'human beings' he declared them to be—and dared

any man to deny it. He pictured India at no distant date a free and self-governing India, an ideal Anglo-Saxon commonwealth. He pictured the genius of India realizing itself shortly. It would be exactly like our own, only a little different. He pictured India in his mind's eye—great. He did not mention that India might be more sober than ourselves, for that would not do for the Evangelicals either. He pictured India successful in industry, but not more industrious than are our working classes, for that also would not do. He pictured India free, mighty, and perfectly harmless.

There was something in the agreeable personality of Mossmore that was both soothing and stimulating. He always spared the vanity of his hearers; he made them feel that each one of them was an active agent of the beneficent Creator, living the strenuous life, fighting the good fight, etc., etc.

Although some of the applause he got was ironical (from the Opposition benches), the moment his voice had ceased the interest of the evening was over. Members dribbled out, leaving the benches empty, the House dreary and deserted-looking. Mossmore's business was over.

He longed to get up and go out too, but he sat

on, as etiquette demanded, not listening, but staring into vacancy.

After speaking he usually sat down, feeling pleasantly stirred by his own words, and pretty confident that what he had said was more or less true. But that evening his buoyancy had gone; he was suffering from a painful excitement, an excitement that had been suppressed by the crowded business of the day. Now that that business was over Mossmore had time to realize that he felt strangely heavy and despondent. It seemed as if those rare moments—when he thought soberly of life and death in the midnight solitude of his chambers—had been gathered together, intensified a thousand times, and pressed down upon his brain a leaden, hopeless burden. He had spoken that evening because he had to speak, but India was to him a name, a word, and the House he was speaking to a crowd of puppets.

If he lived through that night and the most of the following day—till the evening newspapers came out—he would know that the public knew of his success. That was the very meaning of success! There was nothing else in it! Absolutely nothing. Yes, but what more did he want? What more can any mortal man get out of what he calls life?

His eyes wandered to the faces, profiles, backs of the thinly scattered company. Most of them were full of cares, full of small worldly considerations that in five, ten, twenty years would be meaningless. What was the ultimate significance about them? What was the ultimate significance about any man busy with the business of life? What was the ultimate significance of Mossmore himself?

Ultimate significance was a foolish phrase. It assumed a teleological prevision on the part of Evolution. . . .

Mossmore continued to look round at the House with a dreary interest. Here were men with old ideas, new ideas, no ideas; mostly men who could be trusted a little, not too much, because, behind all ideas new and old, lies human nature working them out grudgingly, scamping them, falsifying them, because all moral action is hampered by the existence of vanity and greed.

Is it worth while trying to force human nature into what we choose to call a good mould instead of a bad mould, and see what comes of it?

Imagine the whole world an international Fabian Society, and every single man compelled to do some honest work, and rewarded with an income of a hundred and fifty pounds

a year! No more starvation, you say; no more overfed insolence; no more vanity and greed.

A cent per cent tax on unearned increment would silence the hilarity of the idle fool more effectively than any scoldings from Father Bernard Vaughan; but as to vanity and greed, there would be a rush for posts in the bureaucracy, and we should be jealous about minute distinctions. Our democratic vanity would make us put generals and judges on their good behaviour. Mrs. Grundy bulks too largely now, but Mrs. Demos will be omnipotent in the future. She will appoint a judge not for his forensic insight but for his teetotalism; she will dismiss a successful general because she discovers that he holds some religious or philosophic view that she considers incompatible with the social welfare, or because, although his tactics have saved a thousand lives, he said 'damn' to his orderly.

Mossmore looked round the benches with no particular enthusiasm. What materials were there already in the House of Commons available for the regeneration of Society? There were the Tories. Why had they forgotten that not so long ago they stood for Humanity and Altruism against the commercial individualism of the Liberals? Why had they already

forgotten their dreams of saving the voteless, rescuing the helpless? What were they doing? Nothing!

Nothing except to make occasional futile expostulation at the truculence and the pious sentimentality of a party who used not so long ago to stand merely as the champions of trade and the promoters of extempore prayer, but who now stand as the saviours of the working man, because they have discovered that the working man is now a formidable voter, and the voice of the political voter is the voice of God.

Mossmore knew that the Tories were not merely amazed at his party's indifference to the British Lion and the Anglican liturgy, but that they were now hopelessly paralysed by fear—the fear of losing their old class privileges. So they did nothing. They did nothing except leave—contrary to their own traditions—the Liberals to bring in the most humane measures, the most admirable legislation that has ever been devised in modern times; such humane legislation would have made Bright writhe in his grave, but would have made Lord Beaconsfield rise and give them his ghostly blessing.

And what of the Labour Party? There was at least no pretence about it. It was frankly

not a patriotic party, but a party for the Trades Unions and for the conversion of Oxford and Cambridge into technical schools. Mossmore could not conceal from himself the fact that the political struggle is becoming keener and more complicated every day. There are wheels within wheels. At present his own party had not touched the question of the responsibility of the capitalist and the investor, the real question!

To tax the landlords was a comparatively safe thing for a middle-class and commercial party to do. The real struggle will come when the Labour men are strong enough to demand that capital be taxed—that will be a case of the biter bit.

These thoughts did not amuse Mossmore. In the civil war that was coming much that was ancient and beautiful would be destroyed, and too much power would be in the hands of ignorant men; men who, for want of social training, confuse self-respect with vanity, punishment with degradation, and who call firmness cruelty.

We shall have stupendous social changes stamped with the impress of men who are unaware of the vastness of the problem, small vain men who fear great men.

There was a pathetic example of this ignorant self-complacence at the last election, when whole masses of working-class voters were easily roused to self-admiration and self-congratulation at bringing up their puny offspring on the superior gentility of white impoverished bread and tea instead of the foreigners' black bread and milk.

It is clear that Great Britain is to be ruled by a numerical majority, what the tub-thumper calls 'the supreme will of a free and thinking people.' The 'free and thinking' numerical majority finds the voice of the tub-thumper more charming than the voice of reason. Mossmore himself, with true political instinct, had seized this idea, and had worked it out.

He was aware that there was one question, however, lurking in the background. We are getting more and more a pleasure-loving people. The way to the suburban millennium may also lead farther on to political extermination. We do not know what world forces are in motion. By the time we have reduced the working day to four hours, and used our leisure in watching football or a coloured cinematograph, we may find ourselves confronted with a different ideal of human life coming from the east—an ideal

of vast, untiring work, ceaseless energy; and the eastern idea of brotherhood may be to compel the world to accept that ideal or to perish under pressure of their competition.

'But whatever happens,' said Mossmore to himself, 'does it matter?' Can anything matter if the totality of the universe consists wholly in a circular movement of the inorganic to the organic, and then back again to the inorganic? Beside that great evolution and devolution, what comes and goes in the petty millions of years of organic life mean nothing, no more than it matters what sort of shape is the vase of soft clay if the potter merely crushes it again into a shapeless lump. Of what significance is it if he had tricked it out with double handles or only one?

Movement, change there must be; but of what consequence is it to the individual who is done with it in seventy years at most? Of what consequence is it to races who cannot survive a million years?

Words came into Mossmore's mind as if shot there by some external influence that was awaiting its opportunity! 'For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known.'

This was mere transcendental philosophy! It may not shadow any eternal truth respecting reality! Why suppose that there is any final fulfilment of human personality? Why should anything *become* of those who work on faithfully though they know that in their life their work is unregarded: men working in laboratories, writing books that bring no wealth to them, plodding in offices and in the fields; women who follow an ideal that leads apparently to nothing —women like Violet Broadlow whom the world thinks unsuccessful? There is absolutely nothing upon which we can base conviction; we can hope, but it is the hope of longing, not of knowledge.

Mossmore shifted his position. He closed his eyes and shut out the benches, the faces. He saw again in memory—as if it had been yesterday—that gorgeous mist on the Sussex Weald, drawn from the blue heavens above and gathered up from the fragrant icy turf beneath, advancing, blotting out the landscape, and rolling up to his feet a sinister grey vapour pressing against him and breathing miasma into every pore, chilling him to his very marrow. He felt that he must rise from his seat. He must get out of the atmosphere of the House. He must get into the fresh air.

Fresh air! It was cold, certainly, bitter, but not fresh; it was full of the chilly breath of seething millions of human beings. The world was going at full speed, a mighty world, palpitating with its work and its pleasure.

Half a dozen different men spoke to Mossmore as he passed. He replied with his usual pleasant banter. A policeman was calling a taxi for him when, to his dismay, a certain Lady Macnaughton laid an appropriating hand on his arm. She had been listening in the gallery, and was now waiting for him with a dog-like patience. Lady Macnaughton had two amiable passions: men, and speaking in public.

'Where are you going?' she asked.

'Into solitude,' he replied, letting his arm drop to avoid the touch of even her gloved hand.

'I love solitude. I 'll go some of the way with you,' she returned. 'Could you put me down at No. 2 —— Street?'

'I 'm so sorry,' he said, suddenly grasping at the idea. 'I 'm going to walk.'

In his present mood Lady Macnaughton merely represented one more needless factor in the dreary muddle of things. This middle-aged erotic political woman was a pitiful object compared with that beautiful modest girl in that solitary house below the ridge of the South

Downs. He felt intolerant of any other woman; as to men, he expected nothing of them, he never had.

'Then what is the taxi for?' asked Lady Macnaughton suspiciously. It was not the first time by any means that she had been snubbed by objects of her admiration.

'For you.' He spoke in a voice that put miles between himself and her. Amiable as he was, he was not a man who could be intruded on.

Lady Macnaughton was not in the least abashed, but she was disappointed.

'You 're in a bad temper,' she said. 'What 's wrong? Wasn't the speech goody-goody enough for Hackney?'

'I hope so,' said Mossmore, and lifting his hat he strode out into the windy bitter night alone, thinking.

'I—and some of my colleagues—and Lady Macnaughton and Mrs. Tremayne, it is we who delight the "People"; it is we who spend our lives preaching the cause of freedom and justice, and it is the Violet Broadlows who train the children, who watch the sick and tend the aged, waiting patiently for a redemption that never comes.' So said Mossmore to himself as he walked back to his chambers.

CHAPTER XV

MRS. TREMAYNE was very busy on the morning of February the 5th. At breakfast Molly was given her presents, and after that there were a hundred things to be thought of in preparation for the dance that evening.

All that week Eva had never divulged to any one her secret about the coming of the veiled Prophet. She had not quite made up her mind whether she would tell dear Dick—so full of silly prejudice—just before the ball, that she had invited the man, or whether she should casually point him out from among her fantastic guests as a real personage of passing interest, and leave her husband to get over his astonishment. Which of the two plans would irritate Dick least?

But it was positive pain to Eva to keep Pansy in the dark. If she told Pansy when she arrived in the ball-room there would be no time to explain properly, and Pansy would never get the whole beauty of the situation into her

noddle. She would need to be well talked to and coached up beforehand if she was really to share the event, and the event would not be half so interesting if it was not shared. After some consideration Eva decided to have Pansy up to lunch, and get her to help her tie the pencils on to the programmes, and tell her all. She must have Pansy at her knee, listening and exclaiming in her ingenuous manner. It was therefore with some suppressed excitement that Eva brought Pansy up from lunch to her own room, and the two women set themselves to tie about three hundred pencils on to the programmes.

'I 've refused Mrs. Dick's At Home to-morrow,' began Eva, watching Pansy as she innocently began fumbling with the basket of pencils.

'Refused!' said Pansy. 'Why? I wouldn't miss it for anything. Ted isn't going, because he dislikes anything religious almost more than he dislikes music. He says he 'd go if it was to hear an actress recite.'

'Mrs. Dick seems to me a foolish and fussy woman,' went on Eva. 'I don't care to know the Dicks too well.'

'It won't be half so much fun if you don't go,' said Pansy, still innocent.

'I 'm sorry,' said Eva. 'But Mrs. Dick is not a serious person; she is a parvenu.'

Lady Peacock flashed a bright look at her friend.

'You know, lately I've been losing my confidence in politics?' continued Eva, 'and have joined the National League for opposing women's suffrage.'

'I knew you were a bit off colour about politics,' said Pansy.

'Well, I am now working at the problem of religion.'

'But that's what Mrs. Dick's after,' said Pansy.

'Try and leave Mrs. Dick out of the talk,' said Eva. 'I want to try and make you see a glimmer of what I've been thinking of lately. One ought to share the light; it is a case of principles—principles.'

'I haven't your brains, Eva, but I 'm really just as keen as you are about principles.'

'I know,' said Eva, smiling satirically, 'or you would be Mrs. Smith now, my dear.'

Pansy coloured up and made a puffing noise in her mouth.

'Don't be beastly. Go on about your religion, Eva.'

'Sorry,' said Eva, 'but you bring it on yourself. Well, I 'll tell you as much as I

think you will take in. To begin with, I 've given up all belief in institutions — Church, State——'

'Do you mean by State Buckingham Palace?' demanded Pansy suspiciously.

'Buckingham Palace!' said Eva. 'My dear Pansy! What I mean is the House of Commons and the Cabinet. I have come to the conclusion that compulsory government is immoral; it does not belong to the free spirit. You can't make people good by Act of Parliament.'

'No, you can't,' said Pansy. 'Why, I don't even know what Acts of Parliament there are, and shouldn't recognize one if I was shown it.'

Eva sighed deeply. What an incorrigible and dear fool Pansy was.

'That 's not what I mean. However, to go on. You have to convert each immortal soul separately, and you must trust Humanity in order to save Humanity; those two principles are all-important.'

'And who 's going to save it?' asked Pansy, licking the point of a pencil thoughtfully.

'When a man is what is called wicked, and he is inclined to be violent, instead of punishing him, which only makes him worse, you ought to feel ever so sorry for him, because he is a martyr to our bad social system, and you ought to

arrange for somebody to take him into their home and make him very, very happy.'

'I shan't take in P.G.'s of that kind,' said Pansy. 'You may if you like, my dear girl, take them into Northdean House.'

'I didn't say you or me; I said somebody,' corrected Eva.

'What a relief,' said Pansy. 'Well, I'm listening.'

'Our army and our navy are a disgrace to civilization,' she went on.

'Really!' said Pansy satirically.

'Yes,' said Eva. 'Your first husband left the army as a lieutenant,' she continued, 'and your present husband has left the navy, so you can scarcely consider yourself a champion of the services.'

'Yes, but dear old James left the army to look after his estate, and Ted has left the navy because there's no promotion and the life's so dull.'

'You're helping to prove my point,' said Eva.

Pansy did not agree with this, but she could not explain why, so Eva went on.

'Well, to go on. Our police are a degrading factor in our civil life. They are making criminals every hour of the day.'

'I've always found them charming,' said Pansy.

'Then the Church. The Church has done its best, I dare say, considering how provincial it is; but now we need something newer, nobler, something world convincing, world compelling, that will make east and west kneel together as brothers before the rising sun.'

Pansy said that she was a little disappointed that Eva was taking up such dismal views.

'They are not dismal,' said Eva. 'In fact I am more hopeful than I was. The other day I came across a man who really has some understanding of all this. A man who to a certain extent echoes some of my views. He is not an Englishman. He's an Oriental.'

Pansy was going to say, 'Not Mrs. Austin Dick's man?' but she checked herself.

'Also he is quite scientific in his method. He has been studying for many years all that is best in India, China, Japan, Arabia, Siberia, Tibet, Mesopotamia, the Sahara (which you may call if you like "The Garden of Allah"), Egypt, Greece, and especially the Druids (the Druids, you know, were actually here in Sussex). Also all that is true in the modern world, in London, Brighton, Birmingham, and of course Rome.'

'Not Paris?' demanded Pansy.

'Of course,' said Eva impatiently. 'He is a cosmopolitan—a Humanitarian. His range of sympathy is really very, very great. He believes as strongly as I do in "the People." Everything that is spontaneous and sincere he admits—the Bible, the Koran, the Blue Bird. I don't mean to say that he has the last word to say on the subject, but he has his claims to be heard for the moment.'

Pansy was thinking this over when Eva remarked, without apparent emotion, that this advocate of Cosmopolitanism and Humanitarianism was coming to the house that very evening, adding at the same time that the ideas expressed by this teacher were, of course, only new to people who had never read and never thought for themselves. She said that she thought he might be very useful to the more illiterate people in provincial towns. She hoped he would.

Pansy received the news with suppressed delight. She was sure that Eva had got Mrs. Dick's man, but she dared not say so. Eva was in an exalted mood.

'Does he go to dances?' she exclaimed instead.

'Not to dance,' said Mrs. Tremayne. 'He

is coming in *en passant*, just for half an hour's chat. I really couldn't fit him in at any other hour. I have no time that I can call my own.'

'And what 's the man's name?' Pansy demanded, still thinking of Mrs. Austin Dick.

'His name wouldn't mean anything to you. He is here to-day and gone to-morrow.' But Eva went on to tell her friend a few more details; something also about the rather striking supernatural gifts claimed for him by admirers, and which Eva pooh-poohed as foolish advertisement.

When Lady Peacock rose to go it was past three o'clock. She wanted to get home before dark; she also wanted to see Violet for a moment, because she had something to give her privately—without Eva's presence. She ran into the nursery, where she found Violet along with Amelia making some alteration in Molly's dress for the evening.

'And what are you going to wear?' demanded Pansy, giving the tall girl a hug. 'Don't come as your great-grandmother, that 's all I implore you. You would look simply divine as Ophelia.'

'Vi 's coming as February,' said Molly. 'Bunches of February flowers—snowdrops, aconite, squills—white, yellow, and blue! But she would look divine anyhow, wouldn't she?'

said the child, stamping vigorously and jerking from side to side, as a sudden relief from the nuisance of being 'tried on.'

Pansy drew out of her bag a letter, and, pulling Violet aside to the window, put it into her hand. 'Read that, promise me; it 'll alter your views, I 'm sure. The friend who wrote it is really a most experienced woman; she knows every single thing, and she does so want to dissuade all young people from taking *the* step, you know. Don't look so strange and startled, dear; read it for my sake—promise!'

'Of course I 'll read it, to please you,' said Violet, and she took the letter. 'I 'll read it,' she repeated mechanically.

'And tell me what you think of it?' demanded Pansy.

'Yes,' said Violet.

'Thanks,' said Pansy. She pressed the girl's arm, and then ran out of the room.

'That 'll do it,' she said to herself as she went downstairs. 'That—and—the other.'

Pansy was full of exuberant joy. She had done what she could about Violet, and she was going to have a really exciting evening. She was quite certain that Eva's modest Oriental, already almost out of date, was Mrs. Austin Dick's great Prophet; and think of Mrs. Austin

Dick's rage when she saw her man already appropriated and thought so little of! How very superior Eva was! Tremayne was standing alone in his own gateway.

'Come along the road a few inches with me,' she said, catching at his coat.

Tremayne turned without speaking and walked along the road.

There was a thin sprinkling of snow on the Downs; the strips of ploughed land by the side of the road were sprinkled too, and all that was not white was brown; tufts of grass at the road edge protruding through the snow were brown; there were fine brown lines striping the ploughed land from top to bottom where the plough had furrowed. Some sheep in a pen in a turfy hollow were pale brown, their wool looking spiky. A puddle at the roadside looked blackish-green. As they walked eastward the sky was covered with a flat, white, woolly cloud that later on was going to turn brown also, a pinkish-brown. Where the sky was clear it was a pale green; more snow was coming that night.

Pansy's blue eyes were sparkling as if she was only eighteen instead of forty.

'Well, and what have you and Eva been doing?' asked Tremayne, trying to seem cheerful.

Pansy placed her finger on her lip, and shook her head.

'Anything wicked?' he demanded.

'Very much so,' said Pansy, 'but of course *you* wouldn't understand *that* part of it.'

'I can't be sure of that unless I know what it is,' said Tremayne.

'Well, it 's something that is highly amusing. It 's very funny, but I didn't know till this afternoon that I was sick of politics and dying for something new.'

'Something new?' said Tremayne.

'Eva said that she had heard, only she couldn't believe it, that he could eat glass without feeling uncomfortable afterwards.'

'Cut glass?' asked Tremayne jocularly, for he was used to Pansy's speaking suddenly in enigmatic terms about unnamed persons.

'She didn't say whether it was necessary to cut it first, but what I imagine is thin window panes, and he bites them into pieces.'

'And who is this ostrich?' asked Tremayne, with only a patient interest.

'Why, the Oriental person,' said Pansy, 'who 's coming to your dance.'

'Though I expect my guests to dress up, I don't expect them to perform tricks,' said Tremayne.

'Yes, but this man is real—a real Oriental.'

'Oriental?' demanded Tremayne.

'Don't you know? He 's putting up at the Queen's Hotel, I think, and is coming in his priestly dress to your ball. He 's teaching some new sort of religion about having no police.'

'Oh yes,' said Tremayne. He seemed to take no interest in the subject, but he still continued to walk on with Pansy instead of turning back. How cool the Tremaynes were about notable people. Very different from poor Mrs. Dick.

'Eva says he prefers diamonds and next to that pearls. But it 's not that that makes me laugh,' said Pansy.

Tremayne still kept silent and walked on, and Pansy rattled away. Eva's interesting teacher passed through Pansy's brain did not gain in respectability by his passage. He issued, in fact, as a very remarkable eastern lunatic peculiarly unsuitable for an old-fashioned country gentleman to introduce to his guests in his own home.

'Are you going on?' demanded Pansy, when she found herself at last conducted to her own villa, and Tremayne not turning home but turning along the road to the main street of Southdean.

'I 'm going on,' called out Tremayne. 'Au revoir.'

'Au revoir,' cried Pansy, waving her hand, and Tremayne tramped on, his face knotted and his small light figure stiff and commanding, towards the Queen's Hotel.

CHAPTER XVI

FOR the sake of Pansy Violet went to her own bedroom, and putting a cloak over her shoulders she opened the letter, standing near the window so as to catch the fading light. Whatever this contained she could bear it. Nothing could matter now, now that she had answered *his* letter; now that she had, before God, kept true to her promise and to her convictions.

The letter ran as follows :—

'DEAR PANSY,—I was deeply interested, also distressed, at what you said about your young friend going into an Anglican convent. I wonder if she realizes what the life is really like? One of my greatest women friends joined a convent years ago, when she was twenty-five. She lived there fifteen years and came out, because she found the life "spiritually" and "mentally" unendurable. Her youth was gone then; her opportunities naturally.

'There is an idea that under the habit most of the temptations of life have gone. Some

temptations, yes, but others are all the stronger. No one who has not lived in a community knows the utter absence of any intellectual outlook there is in the life. An extraordinary pettiness, minute jealousies, nervy sentiment seizes women, (men too), who are cut off from all the natural environment of their sex. They become—the best of them even—abnormal, possessed body and soul by trivialities; and I think that what Canon Barnet says is true—that triviality is worse than sin.

'It is a significant fact that priests and religious thinkers speak of sisters and nuns with less respect than they do of women of the world. Perhaps this is the result of hearing their confessions!

'I firmly believe that conventual life is a bitter disappointment, except, perhaps, to women who are incapable of mental development.

'You cannot urge your friend too strongly to wait and consider. If I knew her I should entreat her to put the idea aside altogether, especially if she is, as you describe her, a girl of fine character.'

Violet let the letter fall upon the floor. Only a few hours ago—last night—she had gone through a moral struggle that she had hoped would not be demanded of her. She had had to renounce the man she loved, for every reason—for conscience, honour, and not the

least, because she thought his letter was inspired by pity.

As life drops into age disappointments are blunted, as well as joys, by the irony of habit; but Violet was young, and all griefs, all disillusions were poignant. Instead of marriage she had asked God for a refuge, peace, security, and now this security seemed taken from her. This letter given her by Pansy had a strong element of truth in it. That was the sting of it. Only two days previously the girl had received a long communication from the Mother Superior of St. Ursula's, a long letter in which Violet had tried not to detect a certain fussiness, a certain self-righteousness, as if the writer was thinking more of herself and her certainty of salvation than of the reader. There was in the letter an apparent ignorance of the complex mental and moral problems that Humanity has to face, and of the agony of the human struggle. Violet had noticed all this and had tried to ignore it. She could not ignore it now! Where was her refuge, the refuge where she could hide herself from the sneers of the world, where she could live among the suffering, helping them to bear their suffering and find peace? Just at the moment when her nerves were trembling from the physical and moral

strain of her final decision, her final wrench with the world of youth and love and girlish hopes, some one was crying out to her that the sacrifice was not complete, that there was more lying before her to endure than she had expected. The austere house to which she was going, her refuge, would be a mental and a moral prison. How cruel!

She had nowhere else to go. She had no home.

And there was no one to whom she could speak, no one to whom she could pour out all her soul. Her confessor, kind as he was, met her always with the obvious commonplaces of orthodox casuistry.

She was not one of those natures which demand from people more than they easily give. She always shrank from expecting too much, and she had depended almost entirely on her own thoughts, and the impersonal help given to her by one or two books of devotion.

One man, who had preached during last Lent at Southdean, and who was coming again next week, might understand her fears. He was a member of the 'Society of the Divine Compassion.' He had preached differently from other men, giving Violet the impression that he was an exceptional man with an exceptional

mind, a man full of humility, comprehending the tragedies not only of the body but of the mind. He had been in the world, had thought and doubted, had loved and sinned and overcome. But he would not come to Southdean till she had gone.

Her heart was so sick that she had not the strength to keep the cloak round her. It fell to the floor, and she stood motionless in the cold and the growing darkness, like a stricken animal in a strange, terrifying place.

Was it God's will that a human being should long for the means of practising humility and self-sacrifice and yet should be denied the opportunity? Does God keep some special moral curse in reserve for those who seek Him?

He demands much from His creatures. The surrender of all they most desire. He demands their very blood and the secret treasures of their brain; and when, after an agonizing struggle, some few come to His feet offering these gifts, has He as a reward for them a punishment of a peculiarly dishonouring kind? Did He send them away robbed of their teeth and claws but prone to the small mean tricks of a starved and stunted nature? What blasphemous thoughts! God was not like that. He was

always merciful, full of love to His creatures, like a father.

Then was God powerless to make His children pure and good? Was He impotent? If He was impotent, then she had no longer any protection from the world or from the terrors of her own mind. There was nothing to prevent her going mad! Nothing!

Just then a voice called to her from the corridor, the loud, clear, hard voice of Eva Tremayne.

'Violet!'

Still Violet did not move. She heard steps coming to the door, and she bent down and gathered up her cloak in her arms.

A sharp knock came at her door. The door opened. She heard the snap of the electric light and the room was illuminated.

Her Aunt Eva stood there, tall, commanding, alert, a presence full of colour and of sound.

'Why are you in the dark?' she asked, and then exclaimed without a pause, 'Violet, my dress hasn't come.'

CHAPTER XVII

THE long dreamless sleep of vigorous health refreshed Mossmore completely that night. His despondent mood had vanished, and he rose in the morning with cheerful alacrity and hopeful anticipation of the day. Last night life had seemed to him tragically mysterious; this morning it was only 'deucedly mysterious,' which is quite another thing.

He had always succeeded, and success was as real as anything else, more real, in fact; at least if it wasn't real, then there wasn't anything which was real.

On his way down to Southdean he glanced now and then from his paper out on the bleak snow-sprinkled country, with the pleasant sensation of possessing health and vigour; convinced that the universe, be it temporary or eternal or neither one thing nor t'other, was a sufficiently inexhaustible mine of humorous situations and agreeably exciting incidents. He was a Cabinet minister, aged thirty-eight;

in the eyes of the world a very eligible man; and he was going down to a mediocre watering-place to find out whether a young woman of no fortune or expectations of a worldly kind would condescend to see him. This was humorous; it was also agreeably exciting.

It was only when he actually walked up the steps of the Queen's Hotel at Southdean, a bitter wind from the troubled sea nearly knocking his hat off as he pushed aside the doors and entered the lounge, that he felt for a moment a pang of anxiety. Was there a letter waiting for him at the bureau?

There was! A letter was handed to him, and he walked into a far corner of the lounge to read it. The handwriting was exactly what he liked from a woman, small and clear; the capitals very distinct. He opened it.

It was a brief, quiet refusal to see him. She wished him 'Good-bye' very gratefully, very modestly. He sat staring at the page, unable at first to grasp the facts before him.

A waiter came up to him.

'I don't think you said, sir, at the bureau, if you were going to stay the night, sir,' he said.

Mossmore looked up at him, and then said, speaking slowly, as if each word cost him a

separate thought, 'I 'll tell you later on. Just now, bring me some coffee and liqueur brandy.'

Ingenious as he was, no solution to the problem of this letter occurred to him. He felt like a man who has suddenly been dealt a stunning blow from behind.

The coffee was placed before him, and he took a sip of it, and tried to think clearly.

Why had he not anticipated her refusal? Why, because his mind had been filled with the one question: 'Am *I* willing to take the risk?' That had seemed to him the one supreme question, the real problem; so much the real problem that there had been no room left for any other.

Just then his eye wandered towards the door, and he saw some one he knew. He half rose. It was Tremayne! He would be coming to look for him, perhaps with a message from her that she relented. For a moment Mossmore fell back on his chair again. After all there *was* that absorbing question: 'Am *I* willing to take the risk?' He drank another sip of his coffee leisurely. He would not do anything undignified. He would watch Tremayne for a moment, and then get up and go and speak to him.

Tremayne went to the bureau and was

evidently asking questions. He was asking, of course, for him, Mossmore. Why didn't the manageress point him out; she knew he was there in the lounge; there was nobody else at his end. How very stupid she was! Mossmore got up from his seat and walked slowly towards the bureau. Tremayne turned, and their eyes met.

Tremayne's weather-beaten, honest face was worried. The sight of Mossmore did not make it relax. Mossmore's face of the stage-hero type was pale, and his eyes narrowly intent.

'You were asking for me?' asked Mossmore, holding out his hand.

Tremayne grasped the hand, and tried to smile and look as if he was not embarrassed. He said he was not asking for Mossmore; on the contrary he was surprised but very glad to see him.

Mossmore pulled himself together, drew a long breath, made a suitable commonplace remark, and invited Tremayne to a cigar and a drink.

'No, thanks,' said Tremayne. He never drank between meals, but he offered to sit with Mossmore for a few minutes and see him drink.

Was he preventing Tremayne from any engagement, any business? Mossmore asked the

question in an imperturbable manner, but his eyes were anxious.

'No,' said Tremayne. 'I really came here to ask about a man, who, however, has just gone out, and I have nothing pressing to do.'

The two men went to the corner of the lounge where Mossmore had been sitting. It was getting dusk already, and the lights were being turned on. A party of people were having tea on the opposite side of the lounge, talking loudly as people do who labour under the impression that their existence is interesting to other people.

'Are you staying here?' asked Tremayne, seating himself opposite his friend and feeling guilty and awkward.

'I don't know,' replied Mossmore, and then a sudden, overpowering desire came over him to tell this plain, childlike, honourable gentleman everything. 'To tell the truth, Tremayne, I hoped you had come with some message for me.'

Tremayne grew very red beneath his tan, and he was going to speak, when Mossmore interrupted.

'I came down here hoping that Miss Broadlow would see me. She has refused to see me. I hoped you had come here to tell me that she had relented.'

The whole mischief was out now, and Mossmore leaned forward in his chair and looked straight into Tremayne's face. 'Good God!' was all Tremayne said, and he sat for some moments looking at Mossmore's coffee-cup, and then up at Mossmore's intent eyes. All kinds of things seemed to have been going on in his house that he had known nothing about, and this was of vital importance. Violet had been carrying her burden all alone. At last he suddenly asked :—

'Why did you want to see her?'

Mossmore heard himself say :—

'I wanted to ask her to be my wife.'

Tremayne would have given anything to have read his companion's thoughts, so that he should know what to say, what to do. Had Violet refused Mossmore because of that Broadlow affair? There could be no other reason. Had she explained?

'You know so little about her,' said Tremayne tentatively and in a low voice.

Mossmore knew what he meant. He got up from his seat with a half-apology and walked away to the doors of the lounge. He pulled a door open and felt the cold wind from the sea blow in upon his face. More snow was coming. The sky, a pale bronze pink in the west, looked

full of disaster somehow. Mossmore let the door swing again and came back to Tremayne, who was sitting in his chair, his eyes bent on the ground, thinking, praying perhaps, for his whole soul was at strife with the Fates about this dear, unhappy girl of his.

'I know everything,' said Mossmore quietly, and he sat down again.

'She told you?' asked Tremayne.

'No,' said Mossmore.

'Then how do you know?'

'Mrs. Tremayne told me,' said Mossmore.

Tremayne's eyes dropped to the ground. He raised them again.

'Violet thinks you don't know,' he said abruptly.

'She doesn't know that I know, but she guesses that I know. There 's no hope *there*.'

Mossmore put out his hand and laid it on Tremayne's arm. 'Is that the only reason for her refusal, do you think? As a man in love, and serious, I have a right to ask you this?'

'You have a right,' said Tremayne with pathetic eagerness. 'I believe it is the only reason.'

'I am ready to take the risk, will she?' Mossmore spoke rapidly, then he went on: 'Tremayne, I am going to use no arguments;

I am not prepared with any. Have you any arguments?' Mossmore stared into his face as a man might into his confessor's, hoping for words of peace and pardon. What Tremayne thought was of supreme importance to Mossmore. He felt a sudden superstitious trust in the opinion of that little orthodox Christian.

Tremayne hid his face in his hands for a moment, and then burst out in a low, tense voice, 'God said "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." I believe that, Mossmore. I don't believe things happen by blind fate, and my dear, beautiful girl has been so good, so true.'

Mossmore grasped his hand. The whole mental attitude of the man was preposterous, and yet Mossmore accepted it for the moment.

'Shall we go outside?' said Tremayne. 'I shall be able to talk better in the cold wind. Do you mind? It 's stuffy here.'

While Mossmore was putting on his coat Tremayne went again to the bureau, and left word that he wished to see the Oriental gentleman on his return in half an hour. He had ascertained that the Oriental gentleman called himself Hermes.

Then the two men went out and sought a sheltered side street, where they could hear each

other speak. Quite naturally, somehow, Tremayne passed his arm through Mossmore's. Both men felt bound together in the thought of this girl. The lamps were being lighted. Once out in the cold air and pledged to speak to each other, neither of them could find anything to say.

At last Mossmore began :—

'When does she go away ?'

'Monday,' said Tremayne.

'Can I see her to-day? I mean, will *you* ask her if she will see me ?'

It was most unfortunate the dance, and most unfortunate this nuisance about this Oriental; everything coming together.

'I can't tell,' said Tremayne after a pause. 'It might be possible for you to see her; perhaps it would create least difficulty if you could come in late this evening—to-night. Nobody would notice or think anything of it. You might come in, say, at midnight to my smoke-room and see her for five minutes. I might be able to arrange it, but I should have to see her alone first, and talk it over and let you know.'

'I can stay over the night,' said Mossmore, 'and take the eight o'clock train to-morrow morning.'

They were close to a telephone-office, and

Mossmore stopped suddenly and proposed going in.

'I will telephone to my valet to come down with my things at once.'

'Wait. Suppose she won't see you? If she refuses I shall not interfere,' said Tremayne. 'You can understand that that would be impossible.'

'I 'll stay in any case,' said Mossmore. The two men felt as if they had always known each other. Tremayne waited outside the office wondering how he should begin to speak to Violet about Mossmore, how he should put the question to her. There was so little time; in four days she would be gone. Every hour seemed precious. He ought to go home at once and speak to her.

When Mossmore came out upon the pavement again Tremayne said to him :—

'I should like to go at once and speak to Violet, but I 'm not sure whether I oughtn't to see this Oriental who calls himself Hermes, and who is at the Queen's Hotel.'

'Oriental,' said Mossmore. 'Archæologist?'

'No, do you know anything about Orientals?' asked Tremayne anxiously.

Mossmore was surprised at the question just now, when the world contained only one

human being besides themselves, *i.e.* Violet Broadlow.

He admitted, however, that he had met some at the Embassies, that he had met Orientals at Oxford, and occasionally had to do with them at the Old Bailey.

The phrase Old Bailey seemed to disturb Tremayne. He gave Mossmore in a few words a watered-down account of the personage described by Pansy, and asked him if he had heard of him. Mossmore had. What did he think he was? Was he respectable? Mossmore thought it was doubtful in the sense in which respectable was used at Northdean House.

'Where do you suppose he comes from?' asked Tremayne.

'From Port Said, from Liverpool, from India, from Valparaiso, from anywhere. He may not be an Oriental; he may be a Spanish-American, or an English scamp,' said Mossmore.

'And yet women of good education,' said Tremayne earnestly, 'have gone to hear him.'

'It only shows that women of good education need protection as much as women with no education,' said Mossmore.

At this Tremayne without more ado told Mossmore that he had come down to the Queen's Hotel with the intention of doing a very

awkward thing—inspecting a stranger before he allowed him to enter his house. 'What else was I to do? A man must protect his wife. Women do such impulsive things through their very ignorance of evil.'

'And suppose he isn't back at the hotel when we return?' asked Mossmore, trying to hide his impatience. An idea occurred to him.

'Shall I interview him for you?' he asked. 'If you want to get back, and he 's not there, I think you can trust me to put him through his paces; only, if he is obviously a scamp, what am I to do?'

Yes, that was an important question. What was to be done exactly.

'Telephone up to me,' said Tremayne. 'I 'll think it out.'

As they went up the steps of the hotel a man came out of the lounge.

Was this Hermes? The man turned his face so rapidly that Tremayne could not distinguish it in the imperfect light. The man passed him, but was now face to face with Mossmore. Mossmore paused and looked straight into the man's face, fixing him with his eyes as if to identify him. Then he removed his eyes and let him pass.

'That 's your man,' he whispered as he

pulled Tremayne's elbow, and made him glance back at the retreating figure.

'Why, do you know him?' asked Tremayne eagerly.

'No, but he 'll think I do, which is all that matters.'

'We 're not certain if it 's he,' said Tremayne.

'I ought to have asked him,' said Mossmore.

'You could scarcely insult any man by asking him if he was "Hermes" unless you were certain he was,' said the Anglo-Saxon huntsman with a grim smile.

At the bureau they were informed that the gentleman who had just gone out was Mr. Hermes, and that he had been told that an interview was requested, and that he had said something about coming back later.

'He seems always coming and going,' said Mossmore. 'I should have thought he would find it too cold outside. Leave him to me, Tremayne.' He conducted Tremayne to the door.

'If she consents to see you,' said Tremayne, standing for a moment with his hands buried deep in his pockets and looking from under the rim of his cap up at Mossmore, 'I will telephone "Yes." You will understand.'

Then the little man went down the steps, got into a taxi, and was gone.

Mossmore felt intolerably restless. He could not sit down. Forgetting that he had not ordered a room, he stepped out again into the bleak evening. He walked up and down in the blustering wind, smoking, never going further than a hundred paces from the hotel.

A newspaper boy came past, and Mossmore bought an evening paper. There was the announcement of his promotion. He had paused under a brilliant electric light that was swaying in the wind. He held the paper, thinking, and the result of his thinking was 'Why not?'

He took out a pencil and marked the paragraph, and folding up the paper wrote on the outside page, 'R. Tremayne, Esq., Northdean House.'

Just as he had done this his eye caught sight of a figure coming towards him. It was Hermes coming back. Mossmore stood stock-still, paper and pencil in hand, and waited for the man's approach.

'If he is a genuine lunatic he will be gratified at the attention he is attracting,' said Mossmore to himself. 'If he is a company promoter turned prophet he will think I am shadowing

him, and I may save Tremayne and myself any further trouble.'

The public announcement of his success on that very afternoon seemed almost as if the Fates had from the first arranged to help him, and Mossmore was beginning to get back his spirits; surely everything must come right. He was in the mood for meeting Mr. Hermes and enjoying the humour of the situation. There he was coming nearer. Mossmore saw a sudden movement of recognition, a sudden impulse to swerve or turn; and then the man, changing his mind, came straight on. Mossmore waited for him, assuming the expression of a stage detective in melodrama. Hermes passed him and walked swiftly on, passed the entrance of the hotel, and disappeared in the darkness.

Mossmore called a taxi that stood on the other side of the road. He gave the man the folded paper, told him to go to Northdean House and to see that it was put into Mr. Tremayne's hands; also to ask if he could take any message or letter back with him to Mr. Mossmore at the Queen's Hotel.

A few minutes later Mossmore walked into the lounge of the hotel, and was told that Mr. Tremayne had telephoned twice to him—a quarter of an hour ago and just a moment ago.

'What was the message?' asked Mossmore.

The first message was 'Yes,' and the second time the message was to ask if Mr. Hermes had returned and been interviewed, and the manageress had answered the question herself in the negative. Mr. Tremayne had then said, 'Interview with Mr. Hermes not necessary.'

Mossmore stood, his whole being agitated by strange emotions. It was true; the Fates seemed to have him in their hands, to have thought about him, planned for him. He would see her, in a few hours, in a little more than six hours. What an intolerable length of time!

CHAPTER XVIII

BEFORE he met Mossmore in the lounge of the Queen's Hotel, Tremayne's mind had been for the moment intensely occupied with the annoyance of having a foreign impostor foisted on to Molly's dance by some passing whim of Eva's. It was all very well for her to rush about among the respectable and harmless residents of Southdean. It had not really mattered, Eva meeting those ritualistic clergy—they could be trusted; but for her to propose bringing a foreigner who performed 'miracles,' about whom she knew nothing, into the house, that was going too far. For her own sake he ought to find out something about this stranger. But now the unexpected encounter with Mossmore had turned his thoughts back into the old channel. He was filled with a passionate hope that Violet would be saved from a convent life, a life that he dreaded for her, and the thought of which filled him with repulsion. Tremayne's religion was crude and absolutely sincere. He accepted

salvation through the Cross of Christ. Thoughts and acts that he, as an English gentleman, considered likely to offend Christ he called sin.

He had done all he could to prevent his sister marrying James Broadlow, not because Broadlow had up to that time showed any definite mania, but because he was extraordinarily self-indulgent and extraordinarily self-righteous, and he denied the existence of 'sin.' Broadlow went about a cheerful, 'sinless' profligate, to Tremayne's simple mind, not at all the sort of person whom the Almighty would be likely to shelter under His wings.

But Violet was altogether different. Tremayne believed firmly that she deserved to be, and therefore was, under God's special protection. A convent seemed to him almost a denial of God's power of protection. Mossmore coming at this last moment to rescue Violet from a nunnery seemed to Tremayne like a messenger sent by divine purpose, if only Violet could be made to see it. Hermes was forgotten. Tremayne's mind contained nothing but intense thought of Violet, and of what he should say to her when he saw her. It needed tact.

At the gates of Northdean House he caught sight of a motor just coming up the drive. Was it his own car? Now if Eva was in it

there would be nothing to prevent his having an immediate interview with Violet alone—alone! Mossmore's anxiety would be relieved. As the car slowed at the gates for the sharp turn Tremayne hailed his own chauffeur, and the two cars drew up together.

It was not Eva! It was Violet herself. Tremayne jumped out and opened the door of his own car.

'Violet,' he said.

Even in the dim light he could see that she had been crying. He even imagined that she was a little thinner. How quiet, how reserved she had been through all her own trouble. It was not good for her such self-repression!

'Do you want me to do anything for you?' she asked; her automatic inquiry. Her voice sounded strained and unnatural.

'Where are you going?' he asked rather urgently.

'About Aunt Eva's dress; it ought to have arrived before four o'clock,' and then she looked confused and abstracted.

Tremayne leaned one hand on the seat and stared hard into his niece's face.

'I've just seen Mossmore,' he blurted out, 'and I told him to come in this evening, late—twelve! He wants to see you. I said I was

sure you would wish to see him. I wasn't wrong, was I? It 's all right, dear, isn't it? '

All Tremayne's ardent longing was in his voice, and also in his keen blue eyes as he gazed at the girl.

Violet did not give her consent, nor did she withhold it. She sat looking dazed, as if she saw something behind him, something that frightened her.

' Go on,' he called to the chauffeur. ' All right. All right, Violet, thanks, dear, thanks.'

The car jerked and was gone.

Tremayne scrambled back into his seat and threw himself as far into a corner as he could, muttering to himself excitedly, ' All right, all right. But what if it 's all wrong as well as all right. She must see him; in God's name she must.'

He could not recover his usual calm till he had paid his driver and was mounting the circular steps of his house.

Once indoors he went straight to the telephone. Mossmore was not in; naturally, he would not expect a message quite so soon. When he did come in he would get the message ' Yes.'

This all-important business disposed of, he must find Eva and tell her at once that he

objected to having a man who could call himself 'Hermes' invited to the house. He would begin with that, and feel his way to telling her anything further.

Eva was in the drawing-room, walking about the room, as if she had been busy doing something and had suddenly stopped.

She knew at once that something had happened.

'Any fresh disaster?' she asked. 'You are always coming in now, Dick, looking like a thunderstorm. I'm too busy to talk about anything but real business. My dress has never come; it really is exasperating.'

Tremayne came nearer.

'It is business, Eva. I was very much surprised to hear this afternoon that you had asked to the dance a foreigner about whom you know nothing.'

'How did you know?' said Mrs. Tremayne. She was extremely annoyed. Now, just when there were a hundred things to think of, she would have to have an argument with Dick. 'Pansy, of course.'

'Why did you not consult me,' asked Tremayne, with some show of irritation, 'before you asked a foreign adventurer?'

'A foreign adventurer, did you say?'

'Yes.'

'There must be some mistake. I don't know any adventurer.'

'A man calling himself "Hermes,"' said Tremayne, pronouncing the name with undisguised suspicion.

'Oh, that 's a different matter. I have asked a philosopher of sorts called Hermes.'

'Well,' said Tremayne, 'why on earth didn't you consult me?'

'Why should I have consulted you, dear? You are not an expert in philosophers.'

'An expert in philosophers!' repeated Tremayne, rather exasperated.

'That 's what I say. If I had invited a horse, I should have asked you to examine its teeth and all that,' she said.

Tremayne could not see any fun in this.

'You invite to our house,' he said, 'a man who makes a living by performing tricks and by lecturing to women on some new religion.'

'He is very busy converting people of all sorts,' said Eva with a snap of anger, 'which is more than your clergy do. As to his making a living, I believe he makes a good one. Think, Dick, we spend millions a year in sending out ignorant noodles to talk nonsense to cultured Orientals, and here is the cultured Oriental

come to talk sense to us, and he makes money. That 's very clever of him ! '

Tremayne was momentarily staggered at the unexpectedness of the argument. The ingenuity with which Eva was making black white and white black was a dangerous ingenuity.

Tremayne did not so much blame his wife for this as he blamed ' ingenuity ' in itself. She was at the mercy of her splendid intellect. It was not in Tremayne's nature to believe that there could be anything very wrong with a beautiful woman, though he had very clearly seen his handsome brother-in-law's moral imperfections.

' The man's antecedents may be anything,' he said, ignoring her last speech. ' Anything.'

' He won't bring his antecedents here,' said Eva. ' Besides, look at St. Augustine, look at some of our Cabinet ministers who govern us if you please, and whom we pay far too highly. Look at our plutocracy—no taste, no culture, like noisy, badly bred children. Look at our aristocracy. They have ceased to be statesmen, and are merely the husbands of Gaiety girls, barmaids, and American heiresses.' Eva laughed.

Tremayne let St. Augustine pass, as he knew nothing about his antecedents.

' There are hundreds, thousands of people in

all classes, who live decent quiet lives like ourselves,' said Tremayne. 'That 's what we have to consider. If this Oriental was really a serious religious fanatic he would not come to a fancy-dress ball. The whole thing is absurd, Eva.'

'Oh, he won't dance,' said Eva; 'he will leave that to the half-pay colonels and broken-down sailors, and the butchers and bakers and what not that Southdean calls society. And listen, Dick, just because his dress is what you would call peculiar, he can come without making any little general or bank clerk we have invited exclaim at him and think himself superior. I know your prejudices, and have done my best not to offend you.'

Eva spoke with spite in her tone.

'Is it a prejudice to expect you to consult my views?' said Tremayne.

'You know nothing, Dick, outside the kennels.'

She came nearer to him and put her hand on his arm, for Dick seemed almost as if he meant actively to interfere. *That must not happen.* What a fool she would look in the eyes of Pansy. Besides Mrs. Dick must be crushed, once and for ever, and the 'fee' had been paid.

'Don't argue, old boy,' she said, 'you do it

so badly. Go and attend to your affairs, your hunting. You understand that; you know that foxes mustn't be shot, that hounds are not called dogs, and you 've only taken forty-five years to learn it all in ; it is so clever of you.' She removed her hand from his arm and walked away in her grandest manner.

'Don't encroach on my woman's domain, and leave me to study religion and philosophy.' She threw this back at him.

Tremayne gazed after her. 'I can't understand,' he said stiffly, 'why you should make such a blunder in common sense; and don't think me hard, dear, if I say good taste. Can't you see it, Eva ? '

'No, I can't,' she answered, without looking at him.

'Well, I do,' he replied.

'You,' said Eva in a peculiar manner that had a sting in it. 'You, dear old boy, you know nothing, think of nothing, do nothing.'

'Do nothing ? ' he repeated. She had sometimes hinted at this, but never before put it so uncompromisingly.

'Nothing ! And you try to prevent me from doing anything, knowing anything ! '

'You don't know what humbugs, charlatans, impostors of all sorts make a living in London

out of the gullible public. A man must protect his wife.'

This angered Eva more than anything he had said before. It was so silly.

'And who's to protect me from you?' she asked, her mouth smiling and her eyes hard.

'From me!' he said, aghast. 'You don't know what you are saying.'

'Am I always to be tied by your narrow views, treated like a child, never to have any life of my own, never to realize myself, never to work out my own salvation?' Her voice rose at each sentence.

'Don't speak like this, Eva,' he said sharply.

'I will speak,' she said. 'You try to destroy me, body and soul.'

She made a passionate movement towards the door.

Tremayne got very white under his tan, and coming towards her grasped her arm.

'You have no right to speak like this to the man who loves you,' he said.

Eva pulled her arm away.

'Loves me! What I long for, above everything else, long for in vain, is respect. Why do you deny me that? Respect,' she repeated in a broken voice, 'I cannot speak to you again

until you offer me a sincere apology.' She opened the door slowly and left the room.

Tremayne stood-stock still. The very ground seemed to be giving way under his feet. Accused of want of respect to his wife! Did she really think he didn't respect her? He hesitated for a few moments, and then he ran swiftly upstairs to his wife's room. She had locked the door. He called, but got no answer. He went downstairs, his head aching with misery. All this horrible quarrel about a stranger; it wasn't worth it. He went to the telephone and called for Mossmore. Mossmore had not yet returned.

'As soon as Mr. Mossmore returns,' he spoke into the telephone, 'tell him that the interview with Mr. Hermes is not necessary. It is not necessary.'

Then Tremayne drew a great sigh of relief and went into the smoke-room. There, with a rapid pen, he wrote a letter to Mossmore. He could not make any explanation through the telephone. It was utterly useless for a private message. Tremayne folded up the letter and addressed it. The world seemed full of women whose emotions and opinions were difficult if not impossible to understand, and who yet had to be scolded, given way to, satisfied. The perspiration was on Tremayne's brow. He

breathed all right, and yet with a tightness that was inexplicable.

He got up to ring the bell, when Johnson came in with the paper from Mossmore. The taxi-man was waiting for any message or letter that was ready for Mr. Mossmore.

For a moment Tremayne could not follow the argument. He stood with the paper in one hand and his letter to Mossmore in the other. Mossmore must have sent the paper before he got any telephone message. That was it. Tremayne scribbled 'Yes' on the outside of his letter and then gave it to Johnson. When Johnson had left the room Tremayne turned the paper over in his hand. What was the paper for? Some advertisement about Hermes in it? He opened it with disgust, still thinking of the complication of his troubles. On the first page was the Cabinet announcement. Tremayne threw the paper on the table near, and walked up and down. Good news!

That ought to help, but would it? If he showed the paper to Violet when she came in, it would mean an interview with her, in which she might argue and might withdraw her consent. He must not see her again alone. He dared not. During the ball he would put the paper into her hands, as if he had only just

received it. It would be acting a lie, of course. If by any chance Violet insisted on coming to the smoke-room to speak about Mossmore, there was only one thing to be done, to say, 'Violet, your Aunt Eva is very much upset. I can't talk about anything else just now. Will you go to her at once and ask her if I can speak to her?' That would distract Violet's attention from her own affairs, and meanwhile the time would pass, and Mossmore once in the house there was hope!

Tremayne took up a book, but he could not read. Why not go at once to the wine-cellar? He was safe there, and he could talk the matter of champagne over with Johnson. Were there enough bottles of that cheap stuff for champagne cup?

For a quarter of an hour Tremayne was busy, his brow knitted as he walked about the dimly lighted cellar looking at the rows of bottles, cool and dusty like minute mummies waiting for their final resurrection from the tomb.

Tremayne went back into his study, and sat down before the fire and smoked a cigar almost into its blaze, poking the coals with the poker, rapping them, stirring them restlessly, listening now and again for the sound of approaching footsteps, hoping for Eva's and fearing Violet's.

After all, it showed a great deal of innocence and simple kindness on Eva's part to trust an Oriental whose face she had not even seen. It might be foolish, but it was the foolishness you expect from a really good woman. She might, somehow, never have thought of asking advice about him. If she had absolutely no suspicion about the man it might never have occurred to her. If she had made a mistake at all, it was in getting mixed up with new-fangled ideas, and not realizing that ordinary people not only objected to them but objected to people who propagated them. The more he thought the matter over the more he blamed himself for not having gone back to the house first and spoken to her. He ought not to have gone to the Queen's Hotel (though it turned out, as it happened, almost providential). Eva had invited the Oriental without consulting him, and he was on the point of interviewing the Oriental without consulting her. Two blacks don't make one white!

She had said horrible things, but they meant nothing; they were the cries of wounded pride. He had spoken too harshly to her; no wonder she was angry. When once the ball was over, and Eva had calmed down, that would be the proper time to talk over the matter at length

with her, and urge her not to patronize people about whom she personally knew nothing.

Tremayne's remorse was not lightened by a sudden panic of wonder why Mossmore had never sent a message of any kind to acknowledge those he had received. It was strange that Mossmore should be absolutely silent. Had he never yet returned to the hotel? Was it possible that he had met Hermes outside, and questioned him and frightened him and sent him about his business without telephoning first to ask for instructions?

Beads of cold sweat came upon Tremayne's brow. What was the time? Only just six.

Tremayne went to the telephone and rang up the manageress of the Queen's Hotel.

'Had Mr. Mossmore returned?'

'Yes.'

Tremayne's nerves relaxed a little. He waited for Mossmore's voice. It came at last.

'Did you get my message about Mr. Hermes?' he spoke into the tube anxiously.

'Yes,' said Mossmore.

'Is it all right?' Tremayne asked. 'You know what I mean?' His voice had an anxious shake in it that he tried to conceal, but though he cleared his throat it was husky.

'I got your letter,' said Mossmore.

'Yes, but is it all right?' repeated Tremayne again. 'All right about our man?' He listened eagerly. 'Is he coming all right?'

After a moment's pause Mossmore's voice came, rather muffled.

'It 's all right.'

'Are you sure? I mean, do you know for certain he hasn't—well—taken offence at being noticed?'

'It 's all right,' said Mossmore's voice again.

'As a great favour to me, will you find out if he is certainly coming,' said Tremayne. 'Would you mind sending up a waiter to him to ask him if he would like me to send the motor for him, and at what hour?'

Tremayne could scarcely believe his own words, but they came out as if he had decided on them long ago.

'All right,' said Mossmore.

Then came a silence, during which Tremayne waited, his pulses going rather rapidly while he murmured to himself, 'Johnson will keep an eye on him, and so will I. Poor old Eva! How can nice women know about all the wickedness of the world? How can they guess it even? Poor Eva!'

Mossmore's voice came rather sooner than Tremayne expected.

'He 's ordered a taxi for himself, and will turn up at ten o'clock.'

'Awfully grateful to you, Mossmore. Shall I see you about twelve?'

The reply was 'Yes, thanks,' and the telephone was rung off.

CHAPTER XIX

TREMAYNE must have done his utmost with Violet, his very utmost. Mossmore was filled with gratitude. If ever he could do Tremayne any service in the future what a pleasure it would be.

He said at the bureau that he should want rooms for himself and his valet, and he went straight out again into the open air. He was excited beyond what he himself supposed was possible to him. He needed movement to make it bearable. He would walk to Laurence's house and see if he was in Southdean. That would be something definite to do. He scarcely felt the cold wind, and the very roaring of the sea sounded full of exultation. Life, and the struggle for life, was a glorious inheritance! Life with its joys *and its sorrows*. He was overwhelmingly glad that Violet had first refused to see him and only submitted after great pressure. He wanted her to marry him, not deliberately, but perforce, because circumstances were too strong for her private con-

victions. Only in that way could she preserve her moral superiority over himself. Of things material and intellectual he had sufficient; what he demanded from her was the 'spiritual.'

He reached Laurence's house, but was told that he was not expected till the following day. It didn't matter one way or the other to Mossmore; all he wanted was to be moving, moving. He walked on farther to where the houses ended, and there came stretches of arid beach mapped into sections by breakwaters. But to Mossmore nothing that evening was arid, nothing dreary. The world was palpitating with significance sweet and strange.

When he came back to the hotel he asked for his room. At the bureau a letter was handed to him. The handwriting must be Tremayne's. Was it possible that Violet had qualified her 'Yes' and that this letter was to say so? There was no reason why he should jump to that conclusion, and yet he did not open the letter at once; he felt the necessity of controlling himself and of taking what came without agitation, otherwise he would be less fit to meet obstacles and overcome them. There had often been similar moments in his career both at the Bar and in the House of Commons, when the enemy had made a sudden

unexpected spring, and Mossmore had won his point, not merely because his mind was of the ingenious rather than the philosophical type, but because he had that command of his emotions, that ability on supreme occasions to feel or not to feel, which is so essential to the success of a great speaker or a great actor.

Mossmore stood, letter in hand, waiting to hear the number of his room. He felt rising within him a fierce, dogged obstinacy. Nothing would ever make him let that girl go. She was the one object of his life.

The manageress whispered something to another woman who was standing behind her, and she rang a bell, handing out Mossmore's number at the same time. It was No. 28.

Mossmore found himself on the first floor, and was shown into a large, brightly lighted room; a fire was burning. It had evidently been lit some time ago.

'A fire already!' said Mossmore, acting his part, and showing his habitual urbanity. 'And I had forgotten to ask for it.'

'The room was ordered by another gentleman, sir,' said the maid, 'but he went away, and I was told to put you here as it 's already warm. It takes some time to warm a room in this weather, sir.'

'I don't wonder,' said Mossmore, and he flung his gloves and coat down on a couch.

A man brought up Mossmore's handbag and rug a moment later, and when he had closed the door behind him, and not till then, Mossmore drew a chair before the fire and sat down. He very deliberately opened the letter, and read the contents.

'DEAR MOSSMORE,—I made a mistake when I proposed interfering with my wife's plans about Mr. Hermes. Her point of view hadn't struck me at the time.

'Scamp or not he *must* put in an appearance to-night. Do nothing, I beg, that could put him off. I am a bit anxious. If you were a married man you would understand.

'As to your affairs, I wish you success with all my heart. I think all depends on your powers of persuasion.—Yours,

'RICHARD TREMAYNE'

Mossmore gave a short laugh and folded up the letter. It was all right! He threw himself back into his chair. Now that it *was* all right he realized that he had been through a very severe nervous strain. He buried his face in his hands and sat motionless for a few minutes. Then he got up and looked again at the letter.

So Mr. Hermes '*must* put in an appearance,' and yet twice that afternoon Mossmore had done

what he could to make the man suspicious of Southdean and especially of the Queen's Hotel.

While Tremayne had been doing his best for him, he, Mossmore, had, with the best intention, been doing the worst he could for Tremayne's peace of mind. It was extremely unfortunate. Perhaps the wise thing to do would be to find out if Hermes had come back to the hotel, interview him at once and conciliate him, make certain that no mischief had been done, and if any had been done, make it right for dear old Tremayne. He rang the bell.

When the maid appeared he asked if she would inquire whether Mr. Hermes had returned to the hotel.

'Mr. Hermes has gone,' said the maid. 'This was his room. He left this afternoon.'

'How do you know he 's gone?' asked Mossmore. 'Why, I saw him not long ago.'

'He has gone, sir,' said the maid, 'and he 's left nothing behind him; he 's taken his bag.'

Yet Mossmore remembered distinctly that the man passed the hotel door and did not go in. 'When did he go?' asked Mossmore.

'About an hour or two ago, sir,' she said.

Mossmore was still incredulous. When she was gone he moved round the room. How did the scamp manage to get back and remove

his things. Mossmore was glad of something to do. He mechanically opened a drawer. It was empty. How did Hermes get his bag without returning to the hotel? He might have got in by some back entrance. Mossmore opened the door of the wardrobe. There! The man had left clothes of some sort. Bah! what an odour of stale incense!

Mossmore closed the door, and going to the bell rang it. Of course it was possible that the Prophet had either forgotten part of his wardrobe, or he had not had time to gather it up.

When the maid appeared: 'Do me the favour,' he said, 'of finding out at the bureau whether Mr. Hermes has actually said he was leaving Southdean, and not returning. I can't have my valet settling me in here until I know this.'

The maid wore an enigmatical look on her face as she withdrew.

When she returned she came with the Boots, who explained that Mr. Mossmore could rest assured that the room really was vacant, as Mr. Hermes had not returned to the hotel after going out, but had sent for his bag from the garage behind. He said he wanted to get the lock of the bag repaired. Half an hour later he, the Boots, had seen him with the bag at the

station getting into the London Bridge part of the train.

At the bureau they said that he had not paid for his lunch, and had left no name or address except 'London.'

Mossmore sat quietly in front of the fire. He allowed the servants to go away without mentioning the clothes in the wardrobe. His valet would find them and remove them, and meanwhile he wanted to be left alone in peace —to think.

The only matter with which he himself was concerned was Tremayne, and what Tremayne would do!

Mossmore opened the letter again and read it. 'I am a bit anxious' was the sentence that struck Mossmore. He had been a good deal too clever in his treatment of the Prophet, and poor old Tremayne would have to suffer for it. Should he telephone to him at once that unfortunately Hermes had taken fright and absconded?

Had the man by any possibility left anything behind him that would throw any light on him?

A curiosity seized Mossmore to open the wardrobe again and look closer.

He put on another light, and going to the wardrobe pulled the gown off the hooks and

drew it out. A string of red beads holding a scarab fell on to the wardrobe floor along with two other things that rattled as they fell, a blue silk fan and a masque.

As to the gown, Mossmore threw it on the floor. It was a green cassock. Bah! The smell of it was enough. So this was Mr. Hermes' official robe and etceteras. It was an excellent fancy dress. Mossmore stood looking down at it for some moments in profound thought. Then he picked up the cassock very carefully and held it in front of him. It was long enough.

Was it broad enough? Mossmore moved to the looking-glass and stretched the robe out in front of him, holding his chin high and closing his nostrils. It would be large enough over a shirt.

Mossmore moved back to the wardrobe and threw the gown in, pushed the beads, fan and masque farther in, and slammed the door on them all. He had no sooner done so than a knock came at his door and a man appeared.

'Your valet has just arrived, sir,' he said, 'and, if you please, sir, Mr. Tremayne is telephoning you. Could you speak to him, sir?'

Surely Tremayne must be more than merely anxious; he must be losing his nerve, or he must be sending a message from Violet!

CHAPTER XX

MOSSMORE had found himself compelled by the general fashion of the day to use such phrases in public as 'the infinite moral possibilities in human nature,' 'the Divine in Humanity,' etc.

'Moral incorruptibility' was what he would, when feeling politically sentimental, have described as the object of a 'strenuous hope,' something which other people were going to possess in the future if the Liberals were able to hold their own against the 'Great Enemy.' In private he believed 'moral incorruptibility' was no better than a phrase that could be used as a piece of cheap platform flattery. That a girl like Violet Broadlow might have within her a rare capacity for moral incorruptibility he had been willing to believe from the very first, but when he read her letter and discovered that such incorruptibility was there, real, living, authoritative, he was amazed. His jaunty tenderness towards her had flamed into a sudden passion.

He knew that when he had said to Tremayne 'I will take the risk' he had left the path of far-sighted worldly policy, and had strayed on to a trackless wilderness after the phantasm of a strange spiritual exigency which had assumed luminous heroic proportions, and beside which all solid objects shrank into insignificance. He was in love with an idea. The idea was Violet Broadlow and moral incorruptibility. Without it, he felt his heart growing sick and empty. A man who has no God must have something to take the vacant place when he gets older. He had found something.

As he walked downstairs to the telephone his brain worked rapidly. His success in politics seemed to have absolutely no significance, except in relationship to his future wife; something he could offer her! Things were big or small as they concerned or did not concern Violet Broadlow. All this excitement on the part of Tremayne must have something to do with Violet. Violet was a stupendous fact. Tremayne could not at this critical moment be so greatly agitated about a mere difference with his own wife, unless it meant more than a mere domestic squall, something which involved Violet and Violet's happiness. Mrs. Tremayne might be counted upon to plot some speedy

revenge, if her freak was interfered with. She had shown malice before. Had she threatened that if Tremayne interfered with her plan she would interfere with *his*? She had the power to do profound mischief with a simple, tender girl like Violet. She had fiendish ingenuity. What if she was even now convincing the poor girl that she was ruining a man's future for her own selfishness? Mrs. Tremayne would not hesitate to use any argument that would hit home. The whole situation became sharply defined in Mossmore's mind. It literally jumped at him. There was no other possible explanation of Tremayne's extraordinary desire to have an Oriental impostor at his house; why, he 'saw his wife's point of view.' And the awful thing now was that every hour was precious; time was slipping away while endless mischief was probably being made.

Violet was on the brink of a precipice. He must seize her now or lose her for ever. Tremayne, with all his affection for Violet and all his anxiety that she should marry, was no match for his wife's cunning. He was too loyal.

Something clutched at Mossmore's throat and heart. Mrs. Tremayne would find that she had a more formidable antagonist than she

expected. He would not give up Violet for any living creature on this earth.

At the telephone he listened with his breath held for Tremayne's first words. They came. 'Did you get my message about Mr. Hermes?'

Mossmore's breath came freely again. No message directly from Violet. It was clear that no mischief had been done yet.

'Is it all right?' Tremayne asked. It was clear that as yet Mrs. Tremayne had only threatened what she might or would do if Hermes did not appear.

Mossmore answered, 'I got your letter,' simply to gain a moment's time, and when Tremayne had repeated his demand, 'Is it all right?' Mossmore's mind was made up. It was not all right, but he would make it all right. If the price of his interview with Violet was the Prophet, Mrs. Tremayne should have her Prophet.

He replied briefly, 'It is all right.'

There was no going back on that.

'Mr. Hermes will arrive at ten o'clock punctually,' said Mossmore to himself as he walked into the lift. 'No. 28,' he said to the man. He had got the Prophet's bedroom and the Prophet's clothes. The Prophet's phil-

osophy was of very little consequence. Mossmore found his valet already unpacking his things.

The man was grinning from ear to ear, for he had read the evening papers on the way down, and had seen the news.

'Jenkins,' said Mossmore, 'I 've got to go to a children's party this evening.'

'Yes, sir,' said the man.

'Fancy dress,' said Mossmore.

'Fancy dress, sir,' said the man. 'I didn't understand that, sir.'

'You 'll find mine in the wardrobe,' said Mossmore, going to the fireplace and leaning his back against it, while he watched his servant. Jenkins went to the wardrobe and opened it. He picked up the cassock, the beads, the fan and the masque, and spread them carefully out on the bed, smoothing the wrinkles of the robe. Cabinet ministers did not stand on their dignity nowadays. Still, his master had begun rather early!

'They want fumigating,' said Mossmore. 'They smell beastly.'

The man looked up.

'No man, Jenkins,' said Mossmore sententiously, 'whether drunk or sober, ought to be too busy to make a buffoon of himself at a child's party. You 'll have to get me up to look, as

near as possible, like Ramases, or Charlie's Aunt.'

To make shots at the 'new religion' was not such a difficult task for Mossmore as to eat his dinner. He marvelled that any man should be expected to swallow down the food that was put before him that evening. How can a man eat when every nerve in his body is strung up to the breaking point and his limbs will not keep still. He longed to be on the way to Northdean House. It was even a relief to be dressing. How would he feel when he was in the presence of Tremayne, perhaps of Violet herself? Would he feel ashamed? He refused to think.

It was just when Jenkins was tinging his hands and face a dull Oriental yellow that it flashed through his mind that the real Hermes might not have finally disappeared, that if he found he was not followed by detectives from Southdean he might reassume his rôle of Prophet, and Mrs. Tremayne might discover that there were two Hermes and not one. That would be awkward! The woman did not deserve to be protected, cajoled, satisfied, but she had to be, or her mortification would certainly recoil on Tremayne. Why will scientific men talk so pompously of the wonder and greatness of Evolution? What has it pro-

duced? A handful of noble men and women and an infinite number of fools. The old Hebrews had more sense of humour when they suggested that the Creator had intended to make all things good and had found to His intense indignation that they were bad, and since then has been slashing about Him, making things hot for the world. But yet the world was worth creating for that handful of men and women.

'Wait a moment,' he said to Jenkins, and Mossmore walked up and down the room thinking.

He must make sure that Mrs. Tremayne would never wish to see her Prophet's face again. He must make sure of it, and also rid Tremayne's house of the invasion of new religions, and give him a breathing space till his wife found some new hobby.

Mossmore glanced into the mirror. He was already very unlike the new President of the Local Government Board, though there was no knowing what Cabinet ministers mightn't be like in the near future. A masque seemed scarcely necessary, but it was an added certainty of disguise, because if Violet loved him *she* might see what the others could not see. After they were safely married he should make his confession.

It was not by any means the first time that he had taken the principal part in comedy. Perhaps this play that was about to be acted in poor Tremayne's house would better be called farce. Pretending to talk philosophy to a woman who didn't know the difference between Moses and Aristotle was not comedy; it was a painful farce.

As the moments slipped away the pain of it became more apparent to Mossmore. What he was going to do was an extremely unpleasant duty. It was more than a duty; it was a necessity.

'The taxi is waiting for you, sir,' said Jenkins. 'You said ten minutes to ten, sir.'

How was he to face Violet in this disguise? He had not reckoned on all that this farce might mean of torment to him, even of mere embarrassment.

'All right,' said Mossmore; 'only I took nothing with my dinner. Give me a whisky-and-soda and a biscuit. I need a fillip.'

All the way to Northdean House Mossmore sat forward in his seat staring out of the window, seeing nothing. He was thinking his part over, getting the gist of it clearly in his mind. It would not take long, half an hour from first to last perhaps, and the taxi must wait for him at

the door. If he could escape in half an hour he would be lucky, very lucky. He had often acted before, out of the mere exuberant bounce and gaiety of human nature. He was very far from gay to-night.

The house was full of lights, it seemed swarming with mummers of every imaginable kind.

'The more the better,' said Mossmore mentally as he allowed himself to be divested of his coat, and stood tall, imposing, and Oriental enough for the purpose, holding his fan in one hand and clutching at his rosary with the other.

'What name, sir?' asked Johnson, as he stepped forward to lead the belated stranger to the ball-room door.

'Mr. Hermes,' said Mossmore.

CHAPTER XXI

THE thick woolly clouds in the south-west that had blushed a sinister pink at sunset slowly and surely swelled to a monstrous size until they hung, a low bulging canopy of solid blackness, over the ridge of the Downs, over Southdean, over Northdean, shadowing them in impenetrable gloom.

The wind came straight from the sea. It leapt over the Downs, burst through every gap, and swept across the Weald. Dancers going to Northdean listened to the gusts as they caught the cars along the bare, unprotected road, and beat against them. The same carriages and cars coming back from Northdean with their twinkling lights were blown before the gale.

The little hamlet was quietly asleep in spite of the noise of the elements and of the traffic of the road. Every cottage was dark except the one at the corner not far from the big gates. That was the cottage from which Violet Broad-

low had stepped out upon the frosty pathway that Sunday not so long ago.

Old John was still ailing and still sleepless; a fire burnt in the kitchen, for his wife had to heat food for him in the night. The light of this fire was seen very faintly through the red window curtain, too faintly for the busy passers to notice it. Violet had been in to see the old man that morning, because she knew that later in the day she would be wanted by her aunt at every moment. And now the sick man and his wife were lying awake listening to the unwonted sound of horses' hoofs on the frozen road, and the whistle and hooting of the cars as they approached the gates, bent on that mysterious grandeur of gaiety that the poor watch without envy. Northdean was indeed gay that night. Usually quiet, it was now full of noise, of light, of the warmth of human beings moving to and fro.

Molly, without a masque, was rushing swiftly about full of the importance of a young hostess. She had almost forgotten in the excitement of her thirteenth birthday and of the happy motley romp that Violet was going very soon. Those guests whose dresses had taken some thought, and perhaps more money than they could well afford, frequently slipped their masques

down to be the better recognized. Everybody had arrived very early. Dances are not wasted in the provinces.

Tremayne was wearing the eighteenth-century hunting-dress that had done duty for many years past. Neither he nor his wife were masked. Eva was radiant. She was wearing what her dressmaker called a 'Greek dress of white satin,' her magnificent black hair was bound with silver. If anybody could understand a new religion, surely she could.

Her husband had apologized to her for his hasty remarks. Poor old dear! He had been eager to be reconciled. He saw her point of view at last. All was well! New men, new ideas, she was saying to herself, were the necessary condition of all human progress, the necessary condition of life itself. Even if her husband could not easily understand what progress meant, what life meant, he might in time be trained to stand aside and even sympathize with those who did. She had spoken rather strongly to him, but it was under very distinct provocation, and it had done good. She looked round upon her guests with satisfaction. There they were, old and young, congruous and incongruous, skipping about with very serious determination, brought

together in a hurry by her word of command. It made her smile as she looked, to think that they didn't guess that she had brought them all together for the sole purpose of crushing Mrs. Austin Dick. She meant to 'present' some of them (Pansy, of course, General Briggs, and two or three others) to the interesting stranger when he made his appearance. They wouldn't understand the intellectual value of a man like Hermes, but would have just brains enough to recognize him again when he appeared at Mrs. Dick's and find him a familiar object. That was all she wanted. Why had not Fate made her the wife of a Cabinet minister, or of an ambassador at some important court? That was work she would have loved, that she could have done supremely well.

More than once Lady Peacock ran up and whispered loudly, 'Not come yet?' What a silly child she was!

'Not yet,' said Eva, always with dignity. 'Is there any hurry?'

There was hurry for Pansy; she had promised herself a real treat when the Oriental arrived. Pansy wanted badly to see Mrs. Austin Dick's face, or rather to observe her nose, which was the pivot of her facial movements.

At last the great moment came. Eva's

pulses quickened at the sight of a dress that she knew—the green robe of the Prophet. Here he was at last, not veiled of course, only slightly screened by his masque.

'How splendid!' she exclaimed to herself, 'and mystery in his very walk!'

His walk was indeed mysterious. He came towards her with measured steps, slow and dignified and yet delicately, as if, to use a common expression, he was treading on eggs. His green cassock hung in a decorous priestly manner, his sallow well-cut face was slightly bent, his whole pose watchful, reserved, and religious. He was more, far more, than Eva had hoped for. She felt an amused contempt for all the rest of her company, for foolish, foolish provincial Southdean. Ten pounds was not too much (though it was more than she could afford), ten guineas would not have been too much, to rescue this man from the pretentious monopoly of Mrs. Dick.

She glanced round for her husband. He had been beside her a moment ago, and now he was —where?

Tremayne had been going about trying to look as if he had no private cares. The events of the afternoon had been exhausting. He was tired. The few minutes when he was

in suspense about Hermes had been more fatiguing than a forty-mile run. He had, by a very near shave, risked giving Eva a real grievance against him ; it would have been the first in their married life. The very thought of it made Tremayne very uneasy. Fortunately the scamp was coming. Johnson had his eye on the plate, and there would be time enough the next day to talk the matter over with Eva in a calm and sensible way. She would be sure, when not crossed, to see that in this world it is wiser to act with caution, to avoid foreigners, or at least to demand credentials. Tremayne had consulted his watch once or twice when it was nearing ten o'clock. The man had said he was coming, but here was ten o'clock past, and he hadn't come.

When at last Tremayne caught sight of an unmistakable Eastern priest, a fan, a red rosary, a handsome dark face and repulsively black curls, he knew that he needn't consult his watch again. This was Hermes. He looked an impostor. New religion !

He saw Eva advancing to meet this impostor, advancing to meet him with an outstretched hand and her most flattering manner. How could she ? And yet Tremayne was relieved in his mind. At least Eva had no possible cause

for complaint, and to-morrow, so much might happen before to-morrow that would make the world look brighter. He moved away and walked towards the other end of the ball-room. He longed for the time to pass swiftly, and for Mossmore to be in the house. At dinner Violet's expression had struck Tremayne as very strange, and he had decided that not Johnson but Molly would be the best person to give her the evening paper, at about eleven o'clock; it might help to prepare her a little for Mossmore's appearance at twelve. On Mossmore hung all his hopes. Mossmore was one of those men whose versatility included a knowledge of women and how to manage them. What would be the result of his coming? Happiness for all, or great disappointment? Nearly two whole hours must pass before Mossmore came. Why hadn't he asked him to come earlier? Why had he asked him as late as twelve? He had thought of twelve because Molly's friends would go at twelve and there would be—— No, he didn't know why he had said twelve.

Tremayne had nearly reached the ball-room door that led into a corridor when he felt his arm grasped from behind. Was it Violet come to say that she couldn't, wouldn't see

Mossmore? All the blood left Tremayne's heart for a moment. He turned sharply round. It was Pansy!

'Now, isn't he too good-looking for words?' she said. 'An Oriental all over, but there 's something about him, I can't tell you what, that reminds me of Lord Peacock, I mean dear James.'

Tremayne's heart was now beating steadily again.

'Your husband wasn't an Oriental?' he said.

'No, but there is a faint something! Do look at him.'

'I 've seen the fellow,' said Tremayne, sufficiently at peace about Violet to indulge in other emotions. He felt his anger rise against all teachers of *new* religions.

'Fellow!' exclaimed Pansy. 'Please don't; you positively mustn't. We are all brothers and sisters in this world. He 's *your* brother.' She slipped her masque down and fixed her eyes upon him; they were dancing with mischief.

Tremayne looked straight before him over Pansy's head.

An inward exasperation was struggling to express itself in words. He remained silent for a moment and then exclaimed under his breath:—

'He may be my brother, but I 'm damned if

I 'd have him as my brother-in-law,' and he went out of the door.

Pansy gave a little scream, but her attention was again fixed on the distant end of the ball-room. She was waiting to see the 'crisis' of the evening. The dancers were streaming out, and she could see quite well from where she was. She longed to have some one to watch with her, somebody who would see the joke. Here was Molly passing with her partner.

'Molly, one minute,' she called, and pressed the child's arm. 'Do look at Mrs. Austin Dick. There, there!'

Molly and her partner whirled round and stared at the other end of the room where Eva could be seen plainly, talking to the stranger in the green cassock. Mrs. Austin Dick was passing on her husband's arm at the moment.

'Has she got her nose wrinkled up at the corners?' whispered Molly. 'Yes, she has. I wish she 'd do that somewhere else and not in our house.'

'Any man of spirit would divorce a wife for it,' said Pansy; 'but what can you expect? Now, have you ever seen Mrs. Dick's nose look worse?' but Molly's partner had already dragged her away, and Pansy received no answer to her question.

Her hilarity was so profound that when General Briggs, dressed as an ancient Hollander, approached and begged to be taken into her confidence, Pansy had no voice with which to make an articulation. When at last she was able to speak coherently, she said that she couldn't possibly explain the cause of her laughter without hopelessly giving away poor Mrs. Austin Dick and poor Mrs. Dick's show to-morrow. But if she told General Briggs that that good-looking black man in the green robe was the very Prophet person that Mrs. Dick was going to exhibit at her party as a startling novelty, and if she told the General that Eva had known him a long time, and didn't regard him at all as anything new, and was introducing him to lots of people in the most casual way,—if she told all that to the General it would be really scarcely fair to Mrs. Dick; in fact, it would be betraying a secret which wild horses would not drag from her, etc., etc., and that now, having exerted all the self-suppression of which she was capable, she must rush off to keep a very important engagement, she dared not say with whom, but she strongly advised the General not to come too near the library during the next half-hour.

What an occasion it was to Eva! There was

only one cloud on her happiness that evening, and it was that the admirable Prophet could not stop long. His devotions—corresponding in a sort of way to Compline—had to be performed at a quarter to eleven o'clock punctually. Still, on the whole, she admired him the more for being always inaccessible at precisely a quarter to eleven, so unlike most people. Eva noticed that the slight colonial twang had disappeared from his voice. Probably the acoustics of the room with the hieroglyphics had produced it. His private voice was certainly an immense improvement on his public voice ; it was much more convincing ; it had a ring of heightened spirituality about it.

Eva was longing to slip aside from the ignorant, ignorant multitude, and take the Prophet to the library, where they could have a quiet talk together about the philosophies and the great trend of modern thought. Pansy was to be permitted to join them. It had all been arranged beforehand with much consideration.

Eva had conceived a charming mental picture of Pansy sitting in the library listening at a respectful distance to a conversation that she could not understand, but which would produce in her attentive but limited mind an impression of magnificent muddle.

Not that Pansy had ever listened to anything silently and attentively before, but this was to be a supreme occasion, and she would therefore have the sense to make a supreme effort.

Pansy herself, however, meant to do nothing of the kind. She was fascinated and excited by the appearance of the Prophet. The perfection of his nose and chin blinded her to the fact that his curls looked as if they had been black-leaded. She meant to share him fully with Eva, to say to him whatever flitted through her mind, and leaving General Briggs she made her way round the corridor and met Eva walking with the object of their mutual admiration.

Pansy took off her masque and greeted the Prophet with some effusion. Her brain was in a whirl of pleasure. She felt that she was 'on the loose'; that is to say, her husband, Captain Smith, was not with her: one of his sharp attacks of gout had kept him at home. Although Pansy was very fond of him, she was not free from a certain sensation of airy liberty when dear Ted's gout unfortunately compelled him to give up one of the local entertainments.

His standard of other people's entertainments was very high, so high that he was never able to say frankly that he was satisfied with them. He could not often, with absolute honesty,

confess that anybody had 'done him well.' This evening Pansy could enjoy everything in a clear, high light, undimmed by clouds of criticism. She was going to have her fling with the eastern sorcerer. She was going to ask him all kinds of questions that have never been thoroughly thrashed out, and that you can't get your rector to answer; for instance, what ought you to do if in the next world you were to suddenly meet both your husbands at some turn in the road?

The two ladies took the Prophet between them, and all three marched towards the hall.

'And to think,' said Eva in a monopolizing voice, and with a monopolizing manner, so as to exclude Pansy as much as possible, 'and to think that there is so little time, scarcely a moment, in which to speak to you about all that one is thinking and dreaming of all day long.'

'Do you think Bridge wrong?' cut in Pansy. It was with the greatest difficulty that she restrained herself from starting the question of her future domestic difficulty at once. 'I do hope you don't object to Bridge?'

Eva glanced round at her friend with a stormy look. The Prophet's time was not to be wasted on silly stale questions like that.

The Prophet fingered the scarab that hung from his rosary while he walked, casting rapid glances from under his brows.

'There is a sense,' he began, 'in which Bridge may be considered an occult game. You deal out the unknown and they become known. Your hand and dummy 's——'

'There!' said Pansy triumphantly. 'Only I wish I could remember what the other cards ought to be; people get so cross. But I do love the game. It 's a really good game.'

'The game has mystic meanings,' said 'Hermes' in a low voice. 'Let them that understand go on understanding. From some it is hidden.'

Then he paused and looked swiftly round the large hall which they were entering. The fire burned brightly in the grate; there was no one sitting on the couch or chairs; a couple were getting up to go, for a fresh dance had begun; the sound of it penetrated through the corridor and sounded in their ears.

Eva was looking at the man beside her furtively. Was he satirical? She rather thought that he had discovered, what was obvious, that poor old Pansy was a fool. This man was a curious puzzle to her, soft, insinuating, and yet she *felt* that he was as hard as steel. Why she felt this she did not know.

'We can talk better in here,' she said, motioning her guests to enter the library.

In the library the Prophet closed the door behind him, and bowing to each lady made a movement with his hands, bidding them to be seated. He himself remained near the door, standing with his back to it and facing them.

'You have unusual insight into the mysteries of life,' said Eva, seating herself proudly on a couch at the end of the room. Pansy sat on the arm of a chair and dangled her masque, her blue eyes fixed on the Oriental. She was fascinated at the way in which he drove them in, as it were into a cage, and kept the door himself. A delightful, dangerous man.

'There is a mystic conundrum which each man has to solve for himself,' said the Prophet solemnly. 'Each man,' he repeated.

'Not women?' broke in Pansy.

'When I say man,' said the Prophet, 'unless referring to the parliamentary franchise, I mean man and woman.'

'Of course,' said Eva hurriedly. 'What we complain of is that our clergy give us no help. They are unspeakably *bornés*. I don't mean that they are any worse than Nonconformists, who are always blaming our Church. Dissenters don't want to make our Church more

spiritual, they simply want to make it less fashionable.'

The Prophet listened with attention, his face still bent and contemplative.

'They could easily make it less fashionable,' cried Pansy, 'by joining it themselves. Why don't they do that?'

The Prophet here interposed. 'Your civilization is but recent, therefore your religious sense is as yet undeveloped. Is this not so?'

He looked at Mrs. Tremayne.

'I think it is. We must seem crude, childish, to you.'

'Our ancestors,' said Pansy, 'were running about with no clothes on worth mentioning when your ancestors were priests and kings and living in pagodas, I suppose.'

'The ordinary Englishman has not yet begun to be interested in ideas,' said Eva, trying to sweep Pansy aside and addressing the Prophet. 'Our sporting men, of course, can't put two sentences together, and you can take them in with a piece of string and a bent halfpenny.' Here she laughed. 'That doesn't matter. What does matter, what is really serious, is that our so-called educated men are intensely prejudiced against everything that is not strictly commonplace. As to our statesmen—

politicians I should rather call them—we can't trust them——'

'Many of them,' said the Prophet, placing his fan on his lips, 'many of them have not the beginning of wisdom, which is to know that we do not know.'

'How true,' murmured Eva. 'I expect that is what is wrong with them, and also moral weakness; such a lack of grit in our Cabinet men. They are becoming flunkies. We need, badly, supermen. I don't mean, of course, creations by Mr. Bernard Shaw.'

The Prophet bowed.

'All men have their uses,' he said; 'he has cheered many a simple soul by the facility with which he says the Lord's Prayer backwards instead of forwards. But,' and here he paused and added solemnly, 'we were speaking of the puzzle of life. Has any man solved it?'

'You have begun, surely,' murmured Eva. 'Oh, if we could only see beyond appearance to the deep, deep reality that lurks behind.'

'That reality is the secret,' said the Prophet.

Pansy was getting impatient with the turn the talk had taken; she swung her masque impatiently.

'Don't forget, Eva, that Mr. Hermes pro-

mised in his letter that you should have the "great privilege of seeing his face without a masque." You will remember, Mr. Hermes, that you said so, and—may I be present? Would you mind? It would be so awfully kind of you.'

'Lady Peacock is my intimate friend,' said Eva, 'and though she has not made a serious study of philosophy, she is anxious to learn what she can.'

The Prophet moved a few steps, with his hands clasped over each other on his chest, his face bent, deep in thought.

'It would be an enormous favour,' said Pansy again.

Suddenly he turned towards Mrs. Tremayne.

'You speak,' he said, 'of appearance and of reality, of the secret of life. The centuries pass swiftly, and yet there is as yet no answer to the question: What is truth? Shall any answer be given to the children of men? Ladies! the pathway to the Temple of Truth is strewn with the bones of the dead.'

The Prophet pointed with his fan to the ground. 'Is there any hope for us? Is the pathway interminable? Is the Temple a mere phantasm? Is there any answer to the mysteries of life?'

Here he suddenly turned to Lady Peacock.

'All that is in my power to tell you I will tell, unveiled.'

Pansy gave one of her little shrieks.

'But not here,' said the Oriental. 'I can only speak to one single soul alone, in the profoundest solitude. She and I must be absolutely alone, the curtains drawn, the lights low. These are the conditions, absolute and final. Will you accept them, or reject them?' He stood with the palms of his hands extended and waited for a reply; as he did so he moved his face slightly towards Mrs. Tremayne. She stiffened a little.

'I 'm ready,' said Pansy, standing down on the ground. 'Do you mean by lights low all out but one, or do you mean a candle?'

The Prophet's arms dropped to his side. 'The firelight, nothing more,' he said.

'Are you ready, Eva,' cried Pansy, 'or shall I go first?'

Eva had risen to her feet. She looked the Prophet over with a flash of her eyes. He made a sign with his forefinger as he met her gaze. Was it some ancient mystic sign? Some charm? He made it to her, not to Pansy. What did it mean? Would he think her ignorant for not knowing?

'You first, Pansy,' she said slowly; 'I must

go back to the ball-room for a few minutes to be seen by the crowd. Take Mr. Hermes to my sitting-room. I will come later.'

'Time presses,' said 'Hermes,' turning to Lady Peacock. 'Lead me to some remote obscurity.'

CHAPTER XXII

'I 'VE lost him,' said Pansy breathlessly, as she came upon Eva at the ball-room door ten minutes later.

'Lost him! What do you mean?' asked Eva sharply. 'Has not he gone to my room?'

'I didn't take him,' said Pansy, as the two women walked together along the corridor. 'He stopped me when we got out of the hall. But,' and here Pansy put her arm into her friend's, 'as we went we passed Mrs. Austin Dick; she had taken off her masque. We passed her. Her face! He is her man, Eva. It 's no use concealing it from you any longer. You 've got her man, the man who is to entertain us to-morrow. It 's hard lines on Mrs. Dick, only she is such a—you know.'

Eva said nothing. Her head was high and she smiled slightly.

'And he never recognized her,' said Pansy; 'a dead cut.'

'I think he has the power—psychic—of

course,' said Eva, 'to see more than we human beings do. There are times when he perceives spiritually or ignores spiritually.'

'Do you mean,' said Pansy, 'that he couldn't see her even when he looked at her? Do you mean that she looked transparent, like glass?'

'Probably,' said Eva. 'There are more things in heaven and earth than our philosophy knows of. I may not have got the words correctly, but that is the meaning.' Pansy was perfectly satisfied. As far as she knew *anything might* occur on earth and certainly *would* in heaven.

'Well, you know he was to have shown me his face when we got to what he called a remote obscurity or something.'

'Yes,' said Eva, 'and——'

'Well, he stopped me just outside the hall and said, "This place will do." I was so taken aback. He turned suddenly round to me, and whipping off his masque bent down and stared into my face. I thought he was going to kiss me.'

'Bah!' said Eva. 'Pansy, why do you make everything vulgar?'

'There 's no "bah" about it. I merely said "I thought."'

'Exactly; it 's the sort of thing, my dear,

you would think,' said Eva, smiling out of one corner of her mouth.

'Well, he didn't.'

'Of course not,' said Eva.

'There 's no "of course," ' said Pansy. 'He might have, only he didn't.'

'He might have,' repeated Eva.

'I suppose he mightn't have with you, retorted Pansy. 'You 're so very sublime.'

'If that 's what you call sublime, I am,' said Eva.

'What would you do? Scratch him? ' asked Pansy, half conciliated by her admiration, as she looked up at her friend's handsome face.

Eva did not condescend to answer the question.

'Did he *say* anything? ' she asked with a touch of sarcasm. 'Did he pronounce any words in a language you understood? '

'He whispered rather loudly,' said Pansy, her annoyance completely forgotten. 'He said I was to swear never to try and penetrate the mysteries of something or other. I couldn't for the life of me make the word out, so of course I swore.'

'Without knowing what about? ' remarked Eva. 'What a dear fool you are, Pansy.'

'Not such a fool as I look,' said Pansy.

'I can't be expected to keep a promise till I do know what it 's about, so no harm 's done, and I really felt I must oblige such a charming person.'

They had entered the hall.

'What did he look like?' asked Eva. She stopped for a moment at the foot of the staircase and placed her hand on the pedestal. She was immensely curious. She was excited.

'The strange thing was that I *couldn't see him*,' said Pansy. 'I can't explain, but it 's an actual fact. His face seemed to flicker and flicker like the flame of a candle.'

Eva pondered. He had told Pansy nothing; he had never intended to from the first. No serious man would. He had hypnotized her. He was as ingenious as he was sacred. The mystic sign he made meant 'My secret to you alone.' Her heart swelled with pride.

'He wasn't up in your room a few minutes ago; I ran up to see,' said Lady Peacock.

'He may be now,' said Eva. 'He probably asked one of the servants. He may be waiting for me.'

'Life is too short,' cried Pansy; 'it really is too short, with so many charming people in it to know. And to think, Eva, that those are really his own clothes. I am sick of trousers.'

'He talks splendidly, I allow that,' said Eva. 'I will allow that much.'

'I call him dangerously fascinating,' said Pansy. 'I really don't think he ought to be loose.'

'If it wasn't that men were of no consequence to me and religion all in all, I might find him profoundly attractive,' said Eva. 'Good-bye,' and she nodded and went upstairs. At the top of the stairs she looked back at Pansy. 'He is what I call "convincing."'

'Tell me what he says in return for my telling you,' called out Pansy in a gigantic whisper.

Mrs. Tremayne's face looked brilliant and a little scornful as she turned away, leaving Lady Peacock standing at the foot of the staircase gazing up after her.

'Of course Eva thinks that he 'll tell her more than he told me,' said Pansy to herself. 'Of course she thinks that. No one can say that modesty is one of her vices.'

Pansy moved away. For half an hour she had been too busy and excited to realize that a ball was going on. She had been engaged with more important matters. She had better now return to the ball-room. She supposed she ought to find out what dance it was, and look for her partner to take her in to supper. People

were beginning to go to supper. Philosophy is intensely interesting, Orientals are delightful; but, after all, one can't give up eating in this world.

The sound of voices was loud in the corridor; a dance was just over; the music had stopped, and people were hurrying to the drawing-room, the library, and into the dining-room for supper; some were seating themselves on the stairs. Pansy caught sight of Violet walking with her partner, a cavalier. In her white dress with the blue, yellow, and white spring flowers Violet looked very tall and graceful. There was an air of distinction about her. Pansy wondered whether it was fear of the Broadlow inheritance which he might have heard about, or whether it was fear of Violet's distinction—breeding—that had frightened Mossmore. He had not answered Pansy's letter, or made any sign of life. Men did not, on the whole, like what is called 'high breeding.' It made them feel dismal. Pansy was sure of it, and who in the convent where Violet was going would appreciate it? Pansy felt a pang of grief at the thought of a young life so wasted, so empty of all that Pansy herself found so delightful. Had Violet read that letter? Perhaps it would scarcely do to ask her just now.

'What are you doing with a newspaper?' she demanded of Molly, who came swinging along with a newspaper rolled up in her hands and searching the crowd with rapid glances.

'Got to give it to some one,' said Molly, pushing past Lady Peacock without looking at her. 'Sorry, but it's awfully important.'

CHAPTER XXIII

JOHNSON was burdened with an unusual sense of responsibility. Tremayne had told him to keep a masterly eye of observation upon the family silver. He was not told whether any particular guest that evening was suspected of kleptomania; he was given no explanation of any kind. It was therefore with a feeling of weighty enjoyment that he allowed his eyes to rest upon the whole company with a pucker of suspicion. It was only when the yellow gentleman in the green robe made his appearance, unaccompanied by any Southdean resident, and obviously a complete stranger, that the butler guessed that the object of his master's solicitude had at last arrived. He had probably been picked up somewhere by Mrs. Tremayne. That, in Johnson's opinion, was no warrant of his respectability. He might be her latest fad. In fact Johnson was certain that he was, and he covertly watched from the dining-room door the Oriental stranger pass twice, once with Mrs. Tremayne and Lady Peacock, and once alone

with Lady Peacock. He made his own comments on the subject. A few minutes later he was just coming out of the dining-room with a tray of champagne-cup in his hands when he saw the suspicious stranger suddenly come back into the hall alone. Johnson stopped short. Why was he alone and in a hurry? The stranger went into the drawing-room! Johnson stood, uncertain what to do, when Lady Peacock hurried by and ran up the stairs. She came down immediately, however, and disappeared.

No sooner had she gone than the stranger came back again into the hall, and walked to the foot of the staircase. The whole incident had not taken five minutes. Johnson was on the watch.

'Champagne-cup, sir?' he said, hurrying across the hall after the unknown guest.

'No, thanks,' said Mossmore in priestly tones.

'I can get you some champagne, sir, if you don't like cup. Pommeroy Nature, vintage 1900, sir?' Johnson spoke in a low, confidential tone, and looked into Mossmore's face.

'No, thanks,' said Mossmore.

'Anything else I can get you, sir?' persisted Johnson, feeling that he was acting like a professional detective.

'Nothing, thanks,' said Mossmore curtly.

'A whisky-and-soda, sir?' said Johnson.

Mossmore turned round and looked at the man through his masque from head to foot, and then began to walk upstairs.

Johnson seemed to be suspicious, either that or merely impertinent. Mossmore had not gone half a dozen steps when Molly came running up behind him and caught him up. She laid her hand on his cassock, while she seized the rail of the balusters with her other hand. Mossmore ignored her for a moment.

'Are you,' Molly began, rather breathless, 'are you the—the—gentleman—that Mrs. Austin Dick 's hunting for?'

Mossmore released his robe from her clutch and continued walking upstairs.

'Pardon me, you make a mistake,' he said; 'I have never had the honour of the lady's acquaintance.'

'But she knows you,' said Molly.

Mossmore shook his head. 'She 's mistaken.'

'But I 've got to fetch you and take you to her,' said Molly; 'she sent me,' and taking his arm she assisted herself with the aid of it and of the rail, and skipped up step by step along with him. 'You 're dark and in green and you 've a fan and a necklace, and there 's nobody else

like that. Isn't it funny that your chin and teeth are just like somebody's who was here a little while ago,' she added, gazing up at his mouth intently. Then she hummed a tune and pressed heavily on his arm.

Mossmore looked down at her and saw that she had got the evening paper tucked into her sash, the evening news that he had sent to Tremayne. He could see his own pencil-writing upon it.

'Run away, my child,' he said, pulling his arm from her grasp. 'I 'm engaged. Go.' He grasped the rail of the balusters himself, barring her way.

'I 'm engaged too,' she said, 'but I 've got to do things. I 'm a hostess, and what am I to do if you won't come ? '

She relaxed all her limbs in an extraordinary way, and remaining where she was she hung her arms over the rail and gazed down below. She had practically finished one piece of business, though it had proved unsuccessful ; she was about to start another that was much more interesting, the business of the newspaper that she had to give to somebody.

'What shall I say to Mrs. Dick ? She 'll be awfully riled,' she called out, and her eyes searched the entrance to the corridor.

'Say?' said Mossmore, continuing his way upstairs. 'Tell this unknown lady that I need rest and solitude and the starry Heavens, Kismet, Nirvana, Au Revoir.'

Molly rested her cheek for a moment on the cool polished wood of the balusters, and then hooking one arm over the rail slid slowly downstairs, calling out as she went :—

'I won't promise to remember all that.'

At the head of the staircase Mossmore turned. No guest in the hall was taking the slightest notice of him; they were occupied with themselves, and if they had noticed him they would not have thought that there was anything strange in one of the guests dressed like an 'Oriental of sorts' going upstairs in search of a partner. But Johnson was still there with his tray of champagne-cup, and he glanced up the stairs.

Mossmore walked to the first door, the door of Mrs. Tremayne's sitting-room. He opened it. It was empty and nearly dark, only the firelight was gleaming on the pale blue chintzes.

He closed the door behind him, and stood muttering below his breath. When he had entered the ball-room the first thing he had seen was Violet in her white dress, crowned with spring flowers, pale, her eyes half closed. He

had been seized with a sudden fierce indignation that Mrs. Tremayne's vanity and malice should have forced him into this absurd situation.

There was the girl he loved in the arms of an exuberant partner; and he, Mossmore, muzzled, wearing a fool's cap, and unable to speak to her. Mercifully for Mossmore they were stopping their dance; they were leaving the ball-room; they had gone. After that he could think rationally; he could begin this monstrous fooling, and approach his hostess. That was half an hour ago.

Now that he was at last safely in Mrs. Tremayne's room the worst was over. Violet had not seen him. He had not even caught a glimpse of Tremayne. In a few minutes he could escape, but before he could do that he had to face his enemy.

He had taken out his watch. It was nearly a quarter to eleven. Before eleven struck from the stables of Northdean House he would be sitting in his taxi, going back to his hotel.

Mossmore pulled two chairs towards the fire, and sitting down on the one nearest the door he seized the poker and extinguished a flame that had suddenly leapt up. He chopped the coal to atoms, and made them drop into the clear red cavern below. The room was pretty dark

—dark enough. Then he took off his masque. He could hear footsteps coming, not those of some dancer looking vaguely round as he walked, but of somebody with a purpose; the purpose was to enter the room—now! He must do his part with care, for she was a woman who, though she couldn't think, could bite.

The door opened and Eva Tremayne came in. She paused for a second, looked at him, and then closed the door behind her.

Mossmore did not rise. He merely said, without moving or turning his face towards her:—

'Sit down in the chair next me!'

She swept round and seated herself in the other chair. She was very much impressed by this sudden tone of authority. He had only trifled while Pansy was present; now he was serious. Now for some manifestation of his occult power, in which she would take a prominent part as distinguished spectator—somebody worth converting. His face was almost English in outline. Of course we originally came from the plains of India. The whole world came from the east.

'I came as quickly as I could; a hostess is not a free agent. You understood my delay, I hope?' she said.

He felt her eyes upon him, but detected no

sign of recognition in her voice or movements. So—the rest would be easy enough!

'I understand,' he said. 'I am not a free agent either, and I have waited for you beyond the hour in which I am at liberty; but I have kept my promise to you—I am here!' Here he lowered his voice. 'Do you believe,' he asked, still without looking at her, 'do you believe in the pretensions of the professional seer? Have you any faith in those who assert that they can trace the character and the future of the individual in the depths of crystals, in the palms of the hand, in the grains of salt or of sand?'

'Not much faith,' said Eva doubtfully. His voice made her ashamed that she had had her fortune told more than once. She wished now that she hadn't. It was mere waste of money.

'You are right,' said Mossmore. 'There is no element known to earth or sky which reveals within it a force vital enough to symbolize the destinies of man. No element, I say, except one, and that is—fire. Look at the glowing cavern there at your feet while I speak.'

He felt her turn her head and look where he pointed—to the heart of the red-hot fire. He could feel the heat playing upon his hands and his face.

He bent forward, with his elbows resting on his knees, and spoke slowly and emphatically.

'Fire is the origin of the human race—of nature herself. From fire all things came; to it they must return. It is creation, and is also purification, that is—the end. Its duty is to create, and also to destroy. The beasts of the earth know not fire. Had they the knowledge of fire they would become human. The knowledge of fire makes the ape become man, the anthropoid becomes anthropos. From the moment when some wandering genius created fire, from that moment began the dawn of humanity and of civilization. When man becomes a creator, he is born again from the animal into the likeness of God. It is the ultimate destiny of man to *be* God. No man born of woman is greater than Prometheus, the mystic and symbolic first man. Fire once created by man, that sacred element was kept alive in every temple in ancient Egypt, in Persia, in the heart of pagan Rome; it still burns before the altar of every Christian church. Woe be to the race that extinguishes it! The Hebrews saw their Deity in clouds of fire. When the faithful, after a thousand salutations to the beneficent Buddha, see the shadow of his form in the enchanted cave, they see it

thrown upon a background of fire. The Christian saints are painted and truly circled with fire.

'It is in fire, then, and fire alone that the initiated can read something dimly of the hidden life of man and of the destiny of the races. To you, the uninitiated, that cavern of glowing crimson is but glowing crimson; to me it is nature in its elemental form, palpitating, pulsating with its own energy. You see nothing, and yet through your mind and in that element I must see what I shall see. It must be through your mind, which is blind to the realities of fire, that I must perceive what I can perceive. Your subconscious thought I interpret in fire, because I alone can raise the subconsciousness to the pale of consciousness through the medium of fire. Clasp my robe in your left hand firmly.'

He could feel that she was deeply curious, could feel her hand grasp his robe, and he went on more rapidly, raising his voice as he did so:—

'What do I see? The figure of a child. It is dim, and uncertain in form, with the indistinctness of something immature or as yet unknown to you—to any. It passes not into the furnace, but is caught up, and fades into mere pulsating heat; it is gone!

'What comes next? Think, while I look again

into the depths of the fire. It is the figure of a man, a fair-haired Saxon. He rides westwards and eastwards, riding like a centaur. The dreams of the poets are not unknown to him; he can unlock the beauty of nature with a key of pure gold. Look at him. I see him now, standing on a lonely beach; the wind passes over his head, ruffles the surface of the sea as if innumerable fairy legions were skimming over it, flying in hot haste from the encroaching foot and the voice of modern man, flying for ever from their ancient haunts over the pale blue stretch of sunlit sea to some far-off land where they will find peace and safety. These are the thoughts of this man, for to him his native shore, his familiar hills still echo with the voice of ancient days, the fairy beginnings of the world, when the knowledge of fire was new, and the earth full of sudden and strange wonders.

'He has left the shore now, and again he rides. He is simple-hearted, loyal to his beliefs. He moves in the very centre of the furnace, sharp, clear, unharmed, because he is already purified; he needs no flames of Gehenna to purge the soul from corruption. Say, woman, who is it? do you know him?' He made the demand urgently, almost imperiously.

She was leaning forward too. Had he turned

and looked at her he would have seen her eyes, that were a moment ago brilliant and concentrated, now dull and cloudy. Why did he spend the precious time in describing her husband? Why was he interested?

'My husband, I suppose,' she said in a tone of reluctance, as if the words were dragged from her by force.

'Suppose!' said Mossmore. 'Why, these pictures come from the recesses of your own brain; you *know*.'

'It 's my husband,' said Eva, in a subdued voice. Why was he wasting time?

'He has gone,' said Mossmore. 'And now, look again, carefully, for there comes another figure, tall and dark-haired, like yourself, a woman—proud.'

Her eyes woke to a vivid consciousness again. 'Proud.' That was a good word. Now for something keenly interesting.

'What is she proud of? Think deeply now, so that I can see clearly. What is she proud of? Pureness of the spirit? Proud, because as she develops in freedom and knowledge she leaves the multitude and seeks the few, and at last, as great souls always do, becomes a solitary? Think slowly. What is it that her soul craves? Her soul desires, not peace, but the

noise of the multitude, the empty clatter of the world, the beating of drums. Her pride is the pride of fools rejoicing in their folly. She tries to follow the path of the man through the caverns of fire, and she cannot, because she is his spiritual inferior. When the flames of Gehenna have seized her, and burnt out the corruption of her soul, what is left? What is left? Woman, who is this? *You* know—is it you?'

His voice had grown louder, and he had risen to his feet. Now he looked down at her, his features contracted with a fierce displeasure. He was not acting now. She was his enemy. She always had been. All the pent-up indignation within him burst out upon her.

Why could she not retort upon him with that old self-assertive voice? She found neither words nor sounds, for his audacity, his assumption of superiority, his mere physical force, unnerved her. She sat back in her chair stiffly, smiling a little, the smile of one who is trying to rally from the shock of wounded vanity and of an amazing disappointment. He gathered his robe around him, as if repudiating her presence. He moved to the door.

'You have brought me here under false pretences; you have deceived me. You seek

no Temple of Truth, but the market-place where men display their wares, and cry them, and bargain with the passer-by.' Here he paused a moment, and turning the handle of the door, said: 'You need the discipline of the soul, long years of self-abnegation, becoming the servant of servants humbler than the humblest. You need the purification of the wilderness, of waste places, communing with your own heart. Till that is accomplished—farewell.'

He opened the door, went out, and closed it quickly behind him. She was immovable, still smiling.

That damnable farce was over. Now he could leave the house as swiftly as he liked. He was a free man again. And she? Well, she had had enough of the New Religion.

He was already at the head of the staircase when he became strongly aware of a presence, behind him, some way off.

He turned his head, and saw at the end of the corridor a tall white slender figure. It was Violet Broadlow—alone.

For a second he stood irresolute, his hand on the pedestal of the balusters, thinking vehemently, the swift blood coursing through his veins. He had the right now to go to her,

take her in his arms, persuade her, entreat her, overcome her protests, kiss her fears away, and claim her as his own—claim her for better, for worse, for heaven or for hell. He had the right; this fooling, in these vile clothes and this filthy wig, had earned the right. But this fooling was not over; the farce was not played out.

He walked swiftly down the stairs.

No attendant was in the cloak-room. He had been careful to notice where his coat was placed, and finding it he put it on rapidly. No one was in the outer hall. He opened the door and met the bitter air full of a pungent smell of snow. Snow was lying thick on the ground; it was still snowing a little. There was his taxi. The man was sitting inside, tired of waiting in the cold. He saw Mossmore instantly, and jumped out.

'Now that the whole beastly affair is over,' said Mossmore to himself as he got into the car, 'I can breathe. Now comes *my* turn.'

The wind was less furious than it had been. It was dying down, surely! As the car issued from the gates of Northdean House a few flakes of snow beat against the window. No, the wind was still blowing hard.

He had nearly an hour to wait before he

could again enter those gates and go up the steps of that house—a whole hour, every second of which was weighted with an intolerable suspense. Even now, after all he had gone through, though he had earned the right to see her, would he be able to persuade her ? He sat upright in his seat, his nerves tingling, his hands restless. He opened the window to get the air. He had to close it again, for the snow was still beating in, though thinly ; some flakes had settled upon his sleeve.

He took off his wig, drew the rosary over his head, tossed them and his fan and the masque on to the seat opposite. How many minutes would it be before he could wash the filth from his face and hands, and be himself again ? The car seemed to crawl. He took out his watch again. It was twelve minutes past eleven.

Thank God, not all the devils in hell can stop time from moving on. Midnight must come, as surely—yes, as surely as death must come to all of us at last.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN Molly announced to Lady Peacock that the newspaper she had taken out of her sash was for 'somebody,' she was on her second errand; she was searching for Violet.

She went into all the rooms, one after the other, even into the smoke-room, which Tremayne had locked on the outside. Then she came back again into the hall, and went up the staircase, disturbing several couples who had seated themselves there. Violet was at the head of the staircase, sitting with her cavalier. She was sitting just as she had been at dinner and ever since, saying nothing, and looking at things as if she didn't see them. Molly went up to her and put her arms round her neck. Poor darling Violet, how terribly she was feeling that she was going away. She seemed ill with the thought of it this evening, strangely ill.

'I've got to interrupt,' said Molly aloud, and then she began whispering in Violet's ear.

'You 're to read something on the page that 's open. You 'll know what it is when you see it; father says so.'

Then Molly placed the paper in the girl's lap, and waited, her eyes full of expectancy. But Violet looked down at the open paper as if she was blind. She fingered it and said nothing. Violet was ill. Molly was sure of it. She was feeling ill because she was feeling very sad because she was going away, because this was the last birthday of Molly's that she would share with her. Molly looked at her own dance programme, and then whispered again: 'Read the paper when he 's gone; and have you got our one little dance down safely, Vi?'

'I have altered nothing,' said Violet slowly, and as if trying to think. 'Nothing, dear. And yet they won't go away.'

Molly stared. 'Make them,' she whispered again. Then she drew herself away, and said aloud, 'No. 16,' adding in an emphatic voice for the benefit of Violet's partner, 'And don't let them take it, please.' Then the child went downstairs again, squeezing between the balusters and the seated couples. Why did Violet say they won't go away, when all she had to do was to make them?

'Shall I open the paper for you?' asked

Violet's partner. 'Is it anything important? Evening news?'

'No, nothing,' said Violet, closing her hand over the paper. 'At least, I don't know.'

The young man looked at her narrowly. She looked nice enough, but seemed rather a dull girl—no fun in her.

'Are you going to sit here?' he asked, as he rose when the sound of the music came floating up the stairs. 'Who's your next partner? Shall I tell him you're here if I see him?'

'Oh no,' said Violet. 'He'll find me,' and she stood up. 'He'll find me,' she repeated, as if the thought troubled her.

'Shall I put him on the wrong track—would that be of any use to you?' asked the temporary soldier. 'Tell him you expect to find him in the ball-room. What's his costume? What's his name?'

'It doesn't matter,' said Violet. 'It's all right,' and she stood trembling slightly.

He turned away, and went downstairs clattering his unfamiliar sword against his legs. As soon as he had reached the hall, and she had lost sight of him, Violet looked down at the folded paper in her hands. She turned it over and over, unfolded it, and folded it again. There was some sad cruel news in it—that

somebody had gone mad who before was full of health and hope; or perhaps it was about some nun who had drowned herself to escape from a life of intolerable moral misery. God tried to help us. He tried and tried, and He had even sent His Son to try, but He could do nothing perfectly with this strange flesh and blood of ours; nothing perfectly till we had left it behind us and were with Him, pure spirit. In this world every man must bear his own burden. God had warned her of this. Even He could not prevent this. Every man his own burden, and her burden was there, strange, horrible—— Ah! She must never let any one share *that* with her.

But why did her Uncle Dick force her to read about some fresh news of unhappy souls imprisoned in this life? Was it to punish her for having given way to him when he asked her to see the man she loved, and to allow that man to help her bear her burden? Every man shall bear his own burden, that was God's command, and she was not bearing it; she was on the point of asking some one else to help her; on the point of sacrificing some one so dear to her, and perhaps of driving him mad too. She would be punished for her selfishness; she would always see and hear

of sad things, people going mad, people taking their lives because their burden was so great, and God could not help them in this life.

She must read what was in the paper. It was her duty, her fate to read things that were shocking and yet true.

She must find some corner where she could read it, with nobody to look at her when she read it.

Her aunt's room was close at hand. She could read it there alone.

Not alone. Some one was there, some one speaking. The voice sounded like *his*. Had they brought him here before the time—forced him to come and sacrifice himself? Everybody was plotting against him—she was plotting herself—to make him too go mad.

She ran breathless past the room to the end of the corridor. She must just read the paper. That might explain all. There would be something in it about *him*; something that would startle and shake her, and that she must read.

She stood under a light, and unfolded the paper with trembling fingers.

Was it the announcement of his death, and that this voice in her aunt's room was his spirit? Or perhaps the paper would say that he had gone mad, and that was why he had come here,

so that she should see the injury she had done him.

Every man must bear his own burden. If she transgressed that law there could be no forgiveness for her.

She looked at the first page that was uppermost. The sentences looked strange, as if they were written in French, and yet meant something else.

She looked for some name, some word she could recognize. Here at last! 'Mr. Aubrey Mossmore, M.P., the new Cabinet minister!'

They had done that on purpose. They had suddenly thrown work and responsibility and strain upon him, knowing that he had already undertaken a burden that was too heavy for him, that he had promised to marry a girl whose father and brother were mad. They knew that, and they wanted to break him down completely, so that he should have no chance.

Her uncle was conniving at it all. He had sent her the paper to show her how he and everybody and she herself were plotting against this man she loved. And he was there in her aunt's room talking about it, and they were writing down his promise on paper and sealing it, and now they would come and look for her, and then all hope for him would be over.

And she was to blame. She was the greatest sinner of all. She had sinned against that command of God: every man shall bear his own burden. She was the greatest of sinners. She had committed the unforgivable sin, and all because her head was full of how a poor nun would be forced to drown herself to escape from a life of intolerable moral misery, for what else could she do? She would have no home, no refuge, no escape from those terrible moving thoughts, no peace.

Who could she speak to, appeal to? Who would hide her, and prevent her from sinning this great sin? She could speak to nobody; everybody was in league against her and against him. She could trust no one; she dared not speak. Even her thoughts might be heard—seen—by those watching for her, for they had become tangible, living things.

Where should she fly? To her room? No. People would look for her there; they would go there first, and if they found her would drag her out.

Which way could she go? There! Some one was opening a door! It was her aunt's door at the head of the staircase. Her aunt was coming out with *him*, and they would see her and catch her. She must fly. No, it

was not her aunt; it was he himself, but so altered, his hair disordered, his features distorted, his face discoloured! He looked mad! He was trying to escape from them. It was his only hope of sanity. He was looking at her, reproachfully, fearfully. He was afraid of her, because she too was against him and was trying to drive him mad. He was flying from her to hide himself. He had gone! It was no use; they would find him wherever he hid, and they would find her too. She was not safe anywhere; in the darkest corner they would find her. If she crept into a cupboard they would come upon it, and know that she was there, and she would hear them call out, 'Here she is!' If she unlocked the great attic over the gallery and went and hid among the lumber, they would come up, she would hear their steps tramp, tramp up the ladder, they would know in an instant where she had hidden, and she would lie trembling, hearing them bellow, 'There she is behind that chest.' If she climbed upon the roof, her uncle would bring ladders, and the men would scramble up them, and she would hear them shout in the darkness, 'There she is, with her arms round that chimney; we can see her!' Where could she escape to?

If she hid in the cellars they would come down

with lights and search for her, and she would hear them calling out loudly to each other, 'There she is in that corner; we can see her.'

There was nowhere in the house where she was safe. She must fly away—whither? To the open night—to the Downs, where she had always gone in all her troubles! She would be safe there. To the Downs!

CHAPTER XXV

AS Mossmore returned to Northdean he met several cars and carriages returning with Molly's youthful friends, who were not expected to stay till the end of the ball. The road and avenue were noisy with hootings and the sound of wheels and horses' hoofs. The snow had been brushed off the circular steps. The sky was clearing, but there were no stars visible, and the wind was still blowing hard.

Johnson met Mossmore at the door. Now that he was clean, and dressed in the simple severity of ordinary evening dress, Mossmore felt himself a man again.

'Mr. Tremayne told me to take you to the smoke-room, sir,' said Johnson. The man's manner was totally different now; it was his usual deferential manner with an added touch of personal interest, such as an old servant knows how to bestow without offence upon a welcome guest.

'I will tell Mr. Tremayne at once, sir, that

you 're here,' said Johnson as he closed the door.

The smoke-room was empty. Mossmore could hear very faint sounds of music from the distant ball-room. The grown-up dancers were still at their seemingly needless task of jigging to tune and time. Mossmore, who had never danced, marvelled at these voluntary gymnastics in a stuffy room. How senseless it all sounded. What a waste of energy. But waste of energy was one of the conditions of human life—waste of hopes, of efforts. Imagine wasting time when a man has only seventy years to work in, and eternity in which to be non-existent!

Tremayne came in almost at once. His face looked cheerful. He had been speaking to his wife only half an hour ago in the ball-room, and she had not even suggested that the Prophet should be introduced to him. In fact, when Lady Peacock had rushed up to them to ask where the objectionable personage was, Eva had raised her brows and said, as if annoyed at Pansy's excitement, that he had gone, and had turned away as if the matter was of no further interest to her. Anyhow, one trouble was over, and here was Mossmore.

'You are punctual to a minute,' said Tre-

mayne. Then he smiled a little nervously and added, 'Have I already congratulated you?'

'Thanks, you have,' said Mossmore. 'And you have asked her to come—here?' he added, moving to meet his host.

'Not yet,' said Tremayne; 'I wanted to make sure of you first. Now that you're safely here I'll go and fetch her. I shall merely bring her in; I shan't come in myself; I shall leave her to you.'

The little man stood looking at Mossmore, holding the door in his hand.

'I think, if I were you, I'd lay great stress on your *need* of her.'

'That won't be difficult,' said Mossmore.

Tremayne was just going out when he turned and said: 'I may be some minutes before I can find her and bring her; there are cigars on the mantelpiece.' Then he left the room.

How strange, how impossible seemed the farce of only an hour ago, here in this same house. It seemed incredibly silly. Mossmore doubted whether he should ever confess the truth, even to Violet! He settled himself in a chair, and took up several papers—not to read, to look at, something to handle. What do men do who may not, cannot approach the woman they love? What do men do who find themselves

unloved by the woman they love? How do they live through the slow hell fire?

'Politics *versus* Patriotism'—a good title. Mossmore threw the paper down. He could not read a word of anything. 'Politics *versus* Patriotism.' Patriotism fills but a small corner of the political heart that is full of its own personal vanities, ambitions, hates, and desires; and now that politics means to some a profession by which daily bread is earned, patriotism will be squeezed almost out of existence. The politician will be like the Roman priest—a mouthpiece of the authority that is behind him.

The Roman priest retains his sense of honour only because he believes that the authority behind him is supernaturally inspired, and cannot therefore err. The politician who can believe that the temporary majority of whom he is the paid servant is supernaturally inspired will also retain his sense of honour.

The English curate who serves what he pleases to call his God and disobeys his Bishop for a hundred and fifty pounds a year is more of a man than the professional politician. What does it matter?

Let the politician lose his moral virility, and become a machine set agoing by the Political

Curia of the moment. Mossmore did not care. He understood for the first time that men may see thrones, principalities, powers, crash to ruin. He understood that they may see their fortunes go, and not care, because they believe in God, and in ultimate union with Him. He understood that now. He did not believe dogmatically in God, but now he did believe in 'Goodness.' There might be no Supreme Being before whom one can kneel and pray for forgiveness, for enlightenment, but he had at last found a human soul that he could trust. In the girl whose moral purity he could trust lurked a suggestion of the possibility of human immortality.

He had at last, among the shifting and apparently meaningless phases of human life, found something steady; something with a permanent value; something that was an end in itself. Life had some meaning! So vivid was the expectation of her coming that it seemed as if she was almost on the threshold of the room! While he thought, the clock on the mantelpiece struck once. He was startled, and got up to look. Half-past twelve!

Tremayne said he would be some minutes. He had said that at exactly five minutes past twelve. Five-and-twenty minutes had passed.

He took out his own watch and compared it. It *was* half-past twelve. Johnson opened the door quickly and glanced in, shutting it again so rapidly that he did not hear Mossmore call to him. Was Johnson looking for Tremayne? Why couldn't Tremayne bring her at once? Was he persuading her? Was Mrs. Tremayne doing anything, plotting anything? Oh, that woman!

No, Violet was too considerate, too honourable to say that she would see him, and then at the last moment refuse to see him. She was incapable of caprice. Something detained her, some duty, or Mrs. Tremayne was trying to prevent the interview.

Should he go and search for Violet? He would wait first and see. If the worst came to the worst, he would refuse to leave the house till he saw her. He would wait—wait. Tremayne was wholly on his side, passionately eager for the marriage. He would wait till Tremayne came back. But he would not leave the house till he had seen Violet. That resolve made him feel secure. Meanwhile it was useless to try and sit down. He took up one paper, one magazine after another, and threw them down again. He looked at the titles of the dozen books that were lying about. He went

round the room and examined each picture—engravings that he remembered from his first visit. He conscientiously read the names of painter and engraver, half aloud. He read them forwards, he read them backwards. Then he took out his watch again and compared it with the clock. A quarter to one. He opened the door and glanced out. People were passing. He closed the door again. O Violet! His very soul cried out for her, as if in prayer.

He walked up and down the room, repeating her name as if it was sacred.

The moments dragged themselves along until the long hand of the clock pointed out five minutes to one. When it struck one he would go and search for her. Nothing would keep him back. Five more minutes. Three thousand seconds. He heard a voice! It meant something! Just then came rapid footsteps hastening towards the door.

Mossmore stood, the blood seeming to rush to his heart and surge in his brain. How foolish he had been, working himself into a fever of fear. Here she was, true to her promise—of course—of course!

The door opened and Tremayne came in—alone! He had left her just outside. He wanted to speak first—explain—of course.

'Mossmore,' said Tremayne, and he spoke with dry lips and his face was grey, 'she cannot be found anywhere. The whole house has been searched, not a corner left. Some one saw her run out of the front door, but thought nothing of it. The outhouses have been searched; they are searching the garden now, and will come to one of these windows. If they have not found her, we must start on a fresh track.'

Mossmore stood listening to the sound of Tremayne's voice. It was a bell tolling for some incredible disaster. He heard Tremayne call to some one outside, and in came Mrs. Tremayne, and Lady Peacock, Johnson, and a valet. They were carrying things, and they closed the door behind them. They glanced at Mossmore as they entered, and then looked away.

No one spoke, and they moved noiselessly and closely together as figures do in a nightmare. Tremayne went up to Mossmore and laid his hand on his shoulder to rouse him, for Mossmore had never moved.

'She must be somewhere,' said Mossmore hoarsely. His throat was choked.

'Man, trust in God,' was all Tremayne answered; 'trust in God.'

Mossmore saw, as one sees trifles in the midst

of great mental agony, that the boots that Johnson had brought for him and had put on his feet were too big, and that Mrs. Tremayne, shimmering and white, was kneeling on the floor helping the butler to lace them, both working with rapid fingers.

He saw Tremayne put on a thick coat and go to the window with the valet, drawing the curtains and opening the shutters. He saw Lady Peacock standing watching it all, her face suddenly become old and careworn, her eyebrows and lips twitching.

Mossmore was conscious that his wrists and the knuckles of his hands were stiff as he put his arms into the coat that Johnson was holding for him.

A great draught of cold air burst into the room. The window was open to the ground.

Tremayne stepped outside. Men with lanterns were approaching. Mossmore heard them speak. They had not found her in the grounds! Tremayne had never expected that they would find her there; he had some other thought in his mind which he was already prepared to follow out. No precious moments must be lost. He called to Mossmore, but it was not necessary, Mossmore had followed him blindly out into the darkness and seized his arm.

'Is there no hope?' he gasped. 'Is it madness, or—death—or both?'

'God knows,' said Tremayne, not turning his face, and tramping heavily over the fallen snow.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE snow was lying thickly on the ground as the little band of men with lanterns made their way between bare trees, over rough ground, pushing in between snow-laden bushes towards the upper end of the avenue. This was to avoid being seen by the merrymakers.

They turned into the avenue close by the gates. The wind was blowing steadily and bitterly over the Downs. Oh, that bitter wind!

Tremayne crossed the road and went straight to the cottage at the corner, examining the trodden snow as he went. If any one had crossed the road that night the traces might have been obliterated by the traffic.

'It isn't likely, but it is possible,' he said. 'We must exhaust every likely place first. But the snow is untouched. Still——'

He knocked at the little door, strangely small and shabby by lantern light. Mossmore stood beside it, his eyes fixed on it. The men waited in the road. To hope that she was

there was hoping too much, beating himself in vain against the relentless bars of Destiny.

The door opened almost at once, and an old woman stood, holding a shawl over her head and shielding her face from the wind.

'Did you see it, sir?' she asked, stricken with some inexplicable fear.

'See what? Is any one with you, Mary?' asked Tremayne.

'No, sir, only my old man. Is anything wrong, sir? I saw something pass—a fady white figure. I was pulling up the blind to tell my old man if it still snowed, and——'

Tremayne's voice silenced her.

'Which way did it go?'

'Up, sir,' said the old woman, and she pointed backwards with one hand while she held the door with the other. She looked at the little band of men and made an exclamation of alarm.

'That 's all I want to know,' said Tremayne. 'Not a word more, Mary. Shut the door. Go to bed, and good-night.'

He spoke in the manner of a man who prepares quietly for his own doom.

They heard the door close as they moved away.

Tremayne held his lantern higher, and said two words slowly :—

'The Downs.'

He had suspected this from the first. 'Mossmore,' he added, 'keep within arm's length of me—behind—close behind.'

He led the way round by the cottage up the grassy irregular path, now obliterated.

The yellow light of the lanterns fell on the glistening snow, spreading out fan-wise till it reached indistinctness and then blank darkness, darkness all the darker for the bright light at their feet.

Tremayne suppressed a cry. There were some marks in the snow, where fresh snow had fallen over recent footprints. These marks followed the path now obliterated. Yes, the Downs! She had gone to those bare, desolate slopes, trackless and formless by night, on which even a shepherd born and bred among them could lose his way from sheepfold to cottage.

Tremayne held his lantern low, tracking the marks as they skirted the hedge; Mossmore following closely; the men behind.

Suddenly the track started uphill.

They tramped roughly, unaware of their footholds, mounting up without feeling the

steepness of the slope, mounting up as in a monstrous dream, in which all physical sensations are suppressed, so that the victim should have nothing to distract him from that overwhelming horror and despair that he knows he is swiftly approaching.

The lanterns swayed with the force of the wind.

Suddenly Tremayne stopped, uttering an exclamation. He stooped down and picked up a satin shoe, stained, crushed, and clogged with snow. He handed it to Mossmore, who held it against his face. For a moment he could see nothing—his eyes were blinded.

Nothing was of any use now on this earth. He thrust the shoe into his coat and tramped on.

'There is shelter at the stack,' he burst out with, 'some shelter if she reached it.' He cried this out to Tremayne. Tremayne made no answer. The bitter wind was answer enough. They climbed on, up and up, and again Tremayne stopped. The foot tracks had suddenly spread into an irregular shallow patch. Tremayne stooped to examine it. 'She fell,' he said, and swiftly he straightened himself and was climbing on again. The track now made a great circular sweep, which they followed, and then it mounted straight up again.

'We must be near the stack,' said Tremayne. 'Unless we 've overshot it, we must be near. But *she* can't find it. Look, she 's going lower down; she couldn't see anything—no one could—and she was exhausted. Bare arms, bare neck, stockings wet and frozen. She couldn't stand it long! She didn't know where to go!' For a moment his self-control seemed as if it would give way, but he was tramping on again.

They followed the descending tracks. The tracks straggled as if losing aim; they straggled on—a few yards. Both men knew that moments only separated them from what they searched. The end had come; it lay almost at their feet. Tremayne, with his keen huntsman's eyes, saw it first, and in another moment he and Mossmore were on their hands and knees bending over something that was lying in the snow.

Icy feet, stockings caked with matted snow; the girl lay motionless. Her arms were folded together, and her face rested upon them. The flesh was marble cold. Her eyelids were closed, the dark lashes resting on her cheeks. She was at peace now, though there was a slight pucker of the brows, as if some question she had asked had not been answered, something she searched for had not been found.

No passionate speaking of her name could rouse her from that profound repose. There was not a trace of pulse or heart.

The men were huddled together looking on. Had any one brandy? It had not been forgotten. Tremayne had thought of everything. But it was of no use. She was dead. Her teeth were set; they could not even move her stiffened arms.

Mossmore had already torn off his coat, and they were lifting her on to it, covering her with another coat. She was sheltered now—now that it was too late. Then Mossmore and Tremayne between them lifted her up, and bore her as on a bier.

The men walked in front carrying the lanterns. The south-west wind came hurrying angrily from over the sea, sweeping down upon them. How often had Violet in those rich autumn afternoons climbed these slopes, leaving behind her the weald of Sussex with its spots of glimmering chalk, misty woods and meadows, its scattered homesteads, its grey homely churches. How often had she climbed, bathed by sloping rays of yellow light, her feet pressing the short springy turf, her eyes towards the setting sun. What had been her thoughts, the thoughts of a young solitary girl, a young life to whom a

great grief had been entrusted, a burden which she had inherited from her race, and she was to keep as her own, secret from the world, showing to none, entrusting to none? What were the thoughts of this young girl, this priestess of the God of Destiny? What were her thoughts now? She had always climbed westwards; they were bringing her home eastwards—but it was only her body they were bringing. Was she herself, she who had not so long ago these secret thoughts? was she at peace, or was she still climbing westwards, following the track of the great creating Spirit whose offspring she was, and to whom she was returning, bearing her burden till she could lay it at His feet?

Breaking into the solemn tramp on the heavy snow came the voice of Tremayne: 'God have mercy upon us all,' in a hoarse whisper that no one heard but Mossmore.

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